THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

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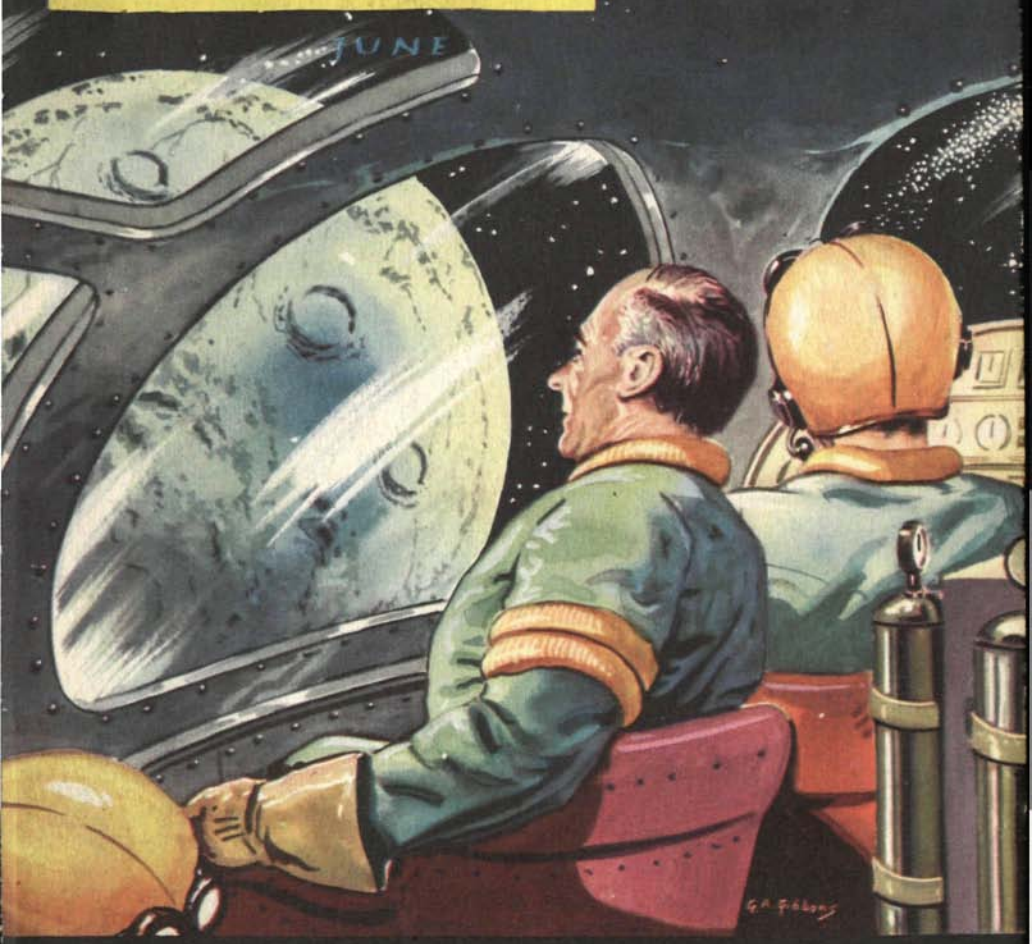

Flies — ISAAC ASIMOV

The Man Who Liked Ants — LESLIE CHARTERIS

also CHARLES L. HARNESS, KRIS NEVILLE, H. NEARING, JR., and others

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A selection of the best stories of fantasy and science fiction, new and old

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 4, No. 6 JUNE

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For fear of revealing all or part of Mr. Harness' dazzling answer to the question he poses we shall merely say that here is an intriguing study of the effects of time travel upon love, in both its psychological and its physiological aspects.

Child by Chronos

by CHARLES L. HARNESS

You just lie there and listen. The sunshine will do you good, and anyhow the doctor said you weren't to do much talking.

I'll get to the point.

I have loved three men. The first was my mother's lover. The second was my husband. The third . . .

I'm going to tell you all about these three men — and me. I'm going to tell you some things that might send you back to the hospital.

Don't interrupt.

As a child I never knew my father. He was declared legally dead several months before I was born. They said he had gone hunting and had never returned. Theoretically you can't miss what you never had. Whoever said that didn't know me. I missed my lost father when I was a brat and when I was a gawky youngster in pigtails and when I was a young lady in a finishing school in Switzerland.

Mother made it worse. There was never any shortage of males when mother was around, but they wouldn't have anything to do with me. And that was her fault. Mother was gorgeous. Men couldn't stay away from her. By the time I was ten, I could tell what they were thinking when they looked at her. When I was twenty they were still looking at her in the same way. *That* was when she finally took a lover, and when I fled from her in hate and horror.

There's nothing remarkable about a daughter's hating her mother. It's just that I did more of it than usual. All the hate that I ever commanded, ever since I was in diapers, I saved, preserved, and vented on her. When I was an infant, so they said, I wouldn't nurse at her breast. Strictly a bottle baby. It was as though I had declared to the world that I hadn't been born in the way mortals are born and that this woman who professed to

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be my mother wasn't really. As you shall see, I wasn't entirely wrong.

I always had the insane feeling that everything she had really belonged to me and that she was keeping me from claiming my own.

Naturally, our tastes were identical. This identity of desire became more and more acute as I grew older. Whatever she had, I regarded as really mine, and generally tried to confiscate it. Particularly men. The irritating thing was, that even though mother never became serious about any of them (except the last one), they still couldn't see me. Except the last one.

Mother's willingness to turn over to me any and all of her gentlemen friends seemed to carry with it the unrelated but inevitable corollary, that none of them (with that one exception) had any desire to *be* turned over.

You're probably thinking that it was all a consequence of not having a father around, that I subconsciously substituted her current male for my missing father, and hence put claims on him equal to hers. You can explain it any way you want to. Anyway, except at the last, it always turned out the same. The more willing she was to get rid of him, the less willing he was to have anything to do with me.

But I never got mad at *them*; only at *her*. Sometimes, if the brush-off was particularly brusque, I wouldn't speak to her for days. Even the sight of her would make me sick to my stomach.

When I was seventeen, on the advice of her psychiatrist, she sent me to school in Switzerland. This psychiatrist said I had the worst Electra complex with the best grounds for it of any woman in medical history. He said he hoped that my father was really dead, because if he should ever turn up alive . . . Well, you could just see him rubbing the folds of his cerebrum in brisk anticipation.

However, the superficial reason they gave for sending me to Switzerland was to get an education. There I was, seventeen, and didn't even know the multiplication table. All I knew was what mother called "headline history." She had yanked me out of public school when I was in the second grade and had hired a flock of tutors to teach me about current events. Nothing but current events. Considering that she made her living by predicting current events before they became current, I suppose her approach was excusable. It was her method of execution that made the subject unutterably dull — then. Mother wouldn't stand for any of the modern methods of history teaching. No analysis of trends and integration of international developments for mother. My apologetic tutors were paid to see that I memorized every headline and caption in every New York *Times* printed since Counterpoint won the Preakness in 1957 — which was even several months before I was born. That and nothing more. There were even a couple of memory experts thrown in, to wrap up each daily pill in a sugar-coated mnemonic.

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So, even if the real reason for sending me to Switzerland was not to get an education, I didn't care. I was glad to stop memorizing headlines.

But I'm getting ahead of my story.

One of the earliest memories of my childhood was a big party mother held at Skyridge, our country lodge. I was six years old. It was the night after James Roosevelt's re-election. Of all the public opinion diagnosticians, only mother had guessed right, and she and the top executives of the dozen odd firms that retained her prophetic services congregated at Skyridge. I was supposed to be upstairs asleep, but the laughter and singing woke me up, and I came down and joined in. Nobody cared. Every time a man put his arm around mother and kissed her, I was there clutching at his coat pockets, howling, "He's *mine*!"

My technique altered as the years passed; my premise didn't.

Do you think it bothered her?

Ha!

The more I tried to take from her, the more amused she became. It wasn't a wry amusement. It gave her real belly laughs. How can you fight *that*? It just made me madder.

You might think I hadn't a shred of justice on my side. Actually, I did.

There was *one* thing that justified my hatred: she didn't really love me. I was her flesh and blood, but she didn't love me. Perhaps she was fond of me, in a lukewarm way, but her heart had no real love in it for me. And I knew it and hated her, and tried to take everything that was hers.

We must have seemed a strange pair. She never addressed me by my name, or even by a personal pronoun. She never even said such things as, "Dear, will you pass the toast?" Instead it was "May I have the toast?" It was as though she considered me a mere extension of herself, like another arm, which had no independent identity. It was galling.

Other girls could keep secrets from their mothers. I couldn't hide anything important from mine. The more I wanted to conceal something, the more certain she was to know it. That was another reason why I didn't mind being shipped off to Switzerland.

I'm sure she wasn't reading my mind. It wasn't telepathy. She couldn't guess phone numbers I had memorized, nor the names of the 25 boys on the county high school football team. Routine things like that generally didn't "get through." And telepathy wouldn't explain what happened the night my car turned over on the Sylvania Turnpike. The hands that helped pull me through the car window were hers. She had been parked by the roadside, waiting. No ambulance; just mother in her car. She had known where and when it would happen, and that I wouldn't be hurt.

After that night I was able to figure out all by myself that mother's business

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firm, Tomorrow, Inc., was based on something more than a knowledge of up-to-the-minute trends in economics, science, and politics.

But *what*?

I never asked her. I didn't think she would tell me, and I didn't want to give her the satisfaction of refusing an explanation. But perhaps that wasn't the only reason I didn't ask. I was also afraid to ask. Toward the end it was almost as though we had arrived at a tacit understanding that I was not to ask, because in good time I was going to find out without asking.

Tomorrow, Inc., made a great deal of money. Mother's success in predicting crucial public developments was uncanny. And she never guessed wrong. Naturally, her clients made even more money than she did, because they had more to invest initially. On her advice they plunged in the deeply depressed market two weeks before the Hague Conference arrived at the historic Concord of 1970. And it was mother who predicted the success of Bartell's neutronic-cerium experiments, in time for Cameron Associates to corner the world supply of monazite sand. And she was equally good at predicting Derby winners, Supreme Court decisions, elections, and that the fourth rocket to the moon would be the first successful one.

She was intelligent, but hardly in the genius class. Her knowledge of the business world was surprisingly limited. She never studied economics or extrapolated stock market curves. Tomorrow, Inc., didn't even have a news ticker in its swank New York office. And she was the highest paid woman in the United States in 1975.

In 1976, during the Christmas holidays, which I was spending with mother at Skyridge during my junior year at college, mother turned down a three year contract with Lloyds of London. I know this because I dug the papers out of the wastebasket after she tore them up. There were eight digits in the proposed annual salary. I knew she was making money, but not that kind. I called her to task.

"I can't take a three year contract," she explained. "I can't even take a year's contract. Because I'm going to retire next month." She was looking away from me, out over the lodge balcony, into the wood. She couldn't see my expression. She murmured, "Did you know your mouth was open rather wide?"

"But you *can't* retire!" I clipped. And then I could have bitten my tongue off. My protest was an admission that I envied her and that I shone in her reflected fame. Well, she had probably known it anyhow. "All right," I continued sullenly. "You're going to retire. Where'll you go? What'll you do?"

"Why, I think I'll stay right here at Skyridge," she said blithely. "Just fixing up the place will keep me busy for a good many months. Take those

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rapids under the balcony, for instance. I think I'll just do away with them. Divert the stream, perhaps. I've grown a little tired of the sound of running water. And then there's all that dogwood out front. I've been considering cutting them all down and maybe putting in a landing field. You never know when a copter might come in handy. And then there's the matter of haystacks. I think we ought to have at least one somewhere on the place. Hay has such a nice smell, and they say it's so stimulating."

"Mother!"

Her brow knitted. "But where could I put a haystack?"

Just why she was using such a puerile method of baiting me I couldn't understand. "Why not in the ravine?" I said acidly. "It'll be dry after you divert the rapids. You'd be famous as the owner of the only ground level haystack in New England."

She brightened immediately. "That's *it*! What a clever girl!"

"And what happens after you get him in the haystack?"

"Why, I guess I'll just keep him there."

"You *guess*!" I cried. (I'd finally trapped her!) "Don't you *know*?"

"I know only the things that are going to happen during the next six months — up until the stroke of midnight, June 3, 1977. As to what happens after that, I can't make any predictions."

"You mean you *won't*."

"*Can't*. My retirement is not arbitrary."

I looked at her incredulously. "I don't understand. You mean — this ability — it's going to leave you — like *that*?" I snapped my fingers.

"Precisely."

"But can't you stop it? Can't your psychiatrist do something?"

"Nobody could do anything for me even if I wanted him to. And I don't want to know what is going to happen after midnight, June 3."

With troubled eyes I studied her face.

At that moment, just as though she'd planned it, the clock began to chime, as if to remind me of our unwritten agreement not to probe into her strange gift.

The answer was only six months away. For the time being I was willing to let it ride.

The epilog to our little conversation was this:

A couple of months later, after I was back at school in Zurich, a friend of mine wrote me that (1) the rapids had been diverted from the stream bed; (2) that just below the balcony the now dry ravine contained ten feet of fresh hay; (3) that the hay was rigged with electronic circuits to sound an alarm in the lodge if anyone went near it; (4) that the dogwood trees had been cut down; (5) that in their place stood a small landing field; (6) and

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that on the field there stood an ambulance copter, hired from a New York hospital, complete with pilot and interne.

"Anility," wrote my friend, "is supposed to develop early in some cases. You ought to come home."

I was having fun at school. I didn't want to come home. Anyway, if mother was losing her mind, there was nothing anybody could do. Furthermore, I didn't want to give up my plans for summering in Italy.

A month later, early in May, my friend wrote again.

It seems that the haystack alarm had gone off one night, two weeks previous, and mother and the servants had hurried down to find a bloody-faced one-eyed man crawling up the gravelly ravine bank. In one hand he was clutching an old pistol. According to reports, mother had the copter whisk him in to a New York hospital, where he still was. He was due to be discharged May 6. The next day, by my calculations.

There were details about how mother had redecorated two bedrooms at the lodge. I knew the bedrooms. They adjoined each other.

Even before I finished the letter I realized there was nothing the matter with mother's mind and never had been. That witch had foreseen all this.

The thing that *was* the matter, and which had apparently escaped everyone but me and mother, was that mother had finally fallen in love.

This was serious.

I canceled the remainder of the semester and the Italian tour and caught the first jet home. I didn't tell anyone I was coming.

So, when I paid off the taxi at the gatehouse, I was able to walk unannounced and unseen around the edge of the estate, and then cut in through the woods toward the ravine and lodge just beyond it.

The first thing I saw on emerging from the trees along the ravine bank was the famous bargain basement haystack. It was occupied.

The sun was shining, but it was early in May, and not particularly warm. Still, mother was wearing one of those new sun briefs that — well, you get the idea. I guess haystacks generate a lot of heat. Spontaneous combustion.

Mother was facing away from me, obstructing *his* one good eye. I hadn't made a sound, but I was suddenly aware of the fact that she had been expecting me and knew I was there.

She turned around, sat up, and smiled at me. "Hi there! Welcome home! Oh, excuse me, this is our good friend Doctor . . . ah . . . Brown. John Brown. Just call him Johnny." She picked a sliver of hay from her hair and flashed a grin at "Johnny."

I stared at them both in turn. Doctor Brown raised up on one elbow and returned my stare as amiably as the glaring black patch over his right eye would permit. "Hello, honey," he said gravely.

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Then he and mother burst out laughing.

It was the queerest sound I'd ever heard. Just as though nothing on earth could ever again be important to either of them.

That summer I saw a lot of Johnny. Things got on an interesting basis very quickly. It wasn't long before he was giving me the kind of look that said, "I'd like to get involved — but . . ." And there he'd stop. Still, I figured that I was making more headway with him than I ever had with any of mother's previous friends.

Finally, though, his "thus far and no farther" response grew irritating. Then challenging. Then . . .

I guess it was being around him constantly, knowing that he and mother were the way they were, that made things turn out the way they did. In the process of trying to reel him in for closer inspection, I got pulled in myself. Eventually I became quite shameless about it. I began trying to get him off to myself at every opportunity.

We talked. But not about *him*. If he knew how he'd had his accident, and how he'd got here, he apparently never told anybody. At least he would never tell me.

We talked about magnetrons.

Don't look so surprised.

Like yourself, he was an expert on magnetrons. I think he knew even more than you about magnetrons. And you thought you were the world's only expert, didn't you?

I pretended to listen to him, but I never understood more than the basic concepts — namely, that magnetrons were little entities sort of like electrons, sort of like gravitons, and sort of like I don't know what. But at least I grasped the idea that a magnetronic field could warp the flow of time, and that if you put an object in such a field, the results could be rather odd.

We talked a lot about magnetrons.

I planned our encounters hours, sometimes days, ahead. Quite early, I started borrowing mother's sun briefs. Later, at times when he *theoretically* wasn't around, I sunbathed *au naturel*. With no visible results except sunburn.

Toward the last I started sneaking out at night into the pines with my sleeping bag. I couldn't stand it, knowing where he probably was.

Not that I gave up.

He was building a magnetronic generator. The first in the world. I'd been helping him all one day to wire up some of his equipment.

He had torn down the balcony railing and was building his machine out on the balcony, right over the ravine. He could focus it, he said. I mean, there was a sort of "lens" effect in the magnetronic field, and he was supposed to be able to focus this field.

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The queer thing was, that when he finally got the lens aligned, the focus was out in thin air, just beyond the edge of the balcony. Directly over the ravine. He didn't want anyone stumbling through the focus by accident.

And through this lens you could hear sounds.

The ravine had been dry for months, ever since mother had diverted the rapids. But now, coming through the lens, was this endless crash of water.

You could hear it all over the house.

The noise made me nervous. It seemed to subdue even *them.*

I didn't like that noise. I hauled my sleeping bag still farther into the pines. I could still hear it.

One night, a quarter of a mile from the house, I crawled out of my sleeping bag and started back toward the house. I was going to wake him up and ask him to turn the thing off.

At least, that was my excuse for returning. And it was perfectly true that I couldn't sleep.

I had it all figured out. Just how quietly I'd open his door, just how I'd tiptoe over to his bed. How I'd bend over him. How I'd put my hand on his chest and shake him, ever so gently.

Everything went as planned, up to a point.

There I was, leaning over his bed, peering through the dark at the blurry outlines of a prone figure.

I stretched out my hand.

It was not a male chest that I touched.

"What do you want?" mother whispered.

In the length of time it took me to get my breath back I decided that if *I* couldn't have him, *she* couldn't either. There comes a limit to all things. We were racing toward the showdown.

He always kept his old pistol on the table ledge, the one he'd brought with him. Soundlessly I reached for it and found it. I knew it was too dark for mother to see what I was now pointing toward her.

I had a clairvoyant awareness of my intent and its consequences. I even knew the place and the time. Murder was building up in Doctor John Brown's bedroom at Skyridge, and the time was five minutes of midnight, June 3, 1977.

"If that goes off," whispered mother calmly, "it'll probably awaken your father."

"My — *who*?" I gasped. The gun butt landed on my toe; I hardly knew I'd dropped it.

I heard what she'd said. But I suddenly realized it didn't make sense. They'd have told me long before, if it had been true. And he wouldn't have looked at me the way he did, day after day. She was lying.

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She continued quietly: "Do you really want him?"

When one woman asks this question of another, it is ordinarily intended as an announcement of a property right, not a query, and the tone of voice ranges from subtle sardonicism to savage gloating.

But mother's voice was quiet and even.

"Yes!" I said harshly.

"Badly enough to have a child by him?"

I couldn't stop now. "Yes."

"Can you swim?"

"Yes," I parrotted stupidly. It was obviously not a time for logic or coherence. There we were, two witches bargaining in life and death, while the bone of our contention slumbered soundly just beyond us.

She whispered: "Do you know when he is from?"

"You mean *where?*"

"*When.* He's from 1957. In 1957 he fell into a magnetronic field — into my 1977 haystack. The lens — out there — is focussed —"

"— on 1957?" I breathed numbly.

"*Early* 1957," she corrected. "It's focussed on a day a couple of months prior to the moment he fell into the lens. If you really want him, all you've got to do is jump through the lens, find him in 1957, and hang on to him. Don't let him fall into the magnetronic field."

I licked my lips. "And suppose he does, anyway?"

"I'll be waiting for him."

"But you already have him. If I should go back, how could I stop something that has already happened?"

"If you hold on to him in 1957, this particular stereochronic alternate of 1977 must collapse, just as though it never happened."

My head was whirling. "But, if I go back to 1957, how can I be sure of finding him in time? Suppose he's on safari in South Africa?"

"You'll find him, right here. He spent the spring and summer of 1957 here at Skyridge. The lodge has always been his property."

I couldn't see her eyes, but I knew they were laughing at me.

"The matter of a child," I said curtly. "What's that got to do with him?"

"Your only chance of holding him permanently," she said coolly, "is the child."

"*The* child?"

"There will be only one. I *think* . . ."

I couldn't make any sense out of it. I stopped trying.

For a full minute there was silence, backgrounded by the gentle rasp of Johnny's breathing and the singing water twenty years away.

I blinked my eyes rapidly.

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I was going to have Johnny. I was going back to 1957. Suddenly I felt jaunty, exhilarated.

The hall clock began to chime midnight.

Within a few seconds June 3, 1977 would pass into history. Mother would be washed up, a has-been, unable to predict even the weather.

I kicked off my slippers and pajamas. I gauged the distance across the balcony. My voice got away from me. "Mother!" I shrieked. "Give us one last prediction!"

Johnny snorted violently and struggled to sit up.

I launched my soaring dive into time. Mother's reply floated after me, through the lens, and I heard it in 1957.

"You didn't stop him."

His real name was James McCarren. He *was* a genuine Ph.D., though, a physics professor. Age, about 40. Had I expected him to be younger? He seemed older than "Johnny." And he had two good eyes. No patch.

He owned Skyridge, all right. Spent his summers there. Liked to hunt and fish between semesters.

And now, my friend, if you'll just relax a bit, I'll tell you what happened on the night of August 5, 1957.

I was leaning over the balcony, staring down at the red-lit tumult of the rapids, when I became aware that Jim was standing in the doorway behind me. I could feel his eyes sliding along my body.

I had been breathing deeply a moment before, trying to slow down the abnormal surging of my lungs, while simultaneously attempting to push Jim's pistol a little higher under my armpit. The cold steel made me shiver.

It was too bad. For during the past two months I had begun to love him in a most interesting way, though, of course, not in the much *more* interesting way I had loved Johnny. (A few weeks with mother can really change a man!) In 1957 Johnny — or Jim — was quaintly solicitous, oddly virginal. Almost fatherly. It was too bad that I was beginning to love him as Jim.

Still, there was mother's last prediction. I had thought about it a long time. So far as I could see, there was only one way to make sure he didn't "go through" to her.

"Come on out," I said, turning my face up to be kissed.

After he had released me, I said, "Do you realize it's been exactly two months since you fished me out of there?"

"The happiest months of my life," he said.

"And you still haven't asked me how I happened to be there — who I am — anything. You're certainly under no illusion that I gave that justice of the peace my right name?"

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He grinned. "If I got too curious, you might vanish back into the whirlpool, like a water nymph."

It was really sad. I shrugged bitterly. "You and your magnetrons."

He started. "*What?* Where did you ever hear about magnetrons? I've never discussed them with anyone!"

"Right here. From you."

His mouth opened and closed slowly. "You're out of your mind!"

"I wish I were. That would make everything seem all right. For, after all, it's only after you get to thinking about it logically that you can understand how impossible it is. It's got to stop, though, and now is the time to stop it."

"Stop *what?*" he demanded.

"The way you and I keep jumping around in time. Especially you. If I don't stop you, you'll go through the lens, and mother will get you. It was her last prediction."

"Lens?" he gurgled.

"The machine. You know, the one with the magnetrons."

"Huh?"

"None of that exists yet, of course," I said, talking mostly to myself. "At least, not outside of your head. You won't build the generator until 1977."

"I can't get the parts now." His voice was numb.

"They'll be available in 1977, though."

"In 1977. . . ?"

"Yes. After you build it in 1977, you'll focus it back to 1957, so that you *could* jump through, now, into 1977, right back into mother's arms, where you already are, in 1977, that is. Only I'm not going to let you. When mother made her last prediction she couldn't have known to what lengths I'd go to stop you."

He passed his hand plaintively over his face. "But . . . but . . . even assuming you're from 1977, and even assuming I'll build a magnetronic generator in 1977, I can't just jump into 1977 and build it. I certainly can't move forward in time to 1977 through a magnetronic field that won't be generated and beamed backwards to 1957 until I arrive in 1977 and generate it. That's as silly as saying that the pilgrims built the *Mayflower* at Plymouth Rock. And anyway, I'm a husband who'll soon be a father. I haven't the faintest intention of running out on my responsibilities."

"And yet," I said, "if the sequence proceeds normally, you *will* leave me . . . for *her*. Tonight you're my lawful husband, the father of our child to be. Then — bing! You're suddenly in 1977 — wife-deserter, philanderer, and mother's lover. I won't let that happen. After all I've been through, I *won't* let her get you. My blood goes into a slow boil, just thinking about

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her, smiling way up there in 1977, thinking how she got rid of me so she could eventually have you all to herself. And me in my condition." My voice broke in an artistic tremulo.

"I *could* age normally," he said. "I could simply wait until 1977 and *then* build the generator."

"You didn't, though — that is, I mean you *won't*. When I last saw you in 1977 you looked even younger than you do now. Maybe it was the patch."

He shrugged his shoulders. "If your presence *here* is a direct consequence of my presence *there*, then there's nothing either of us can do to change the sequence. I don't want to go through. And what could happen to force me through I can't even guess. But we've got to proceed on the assumption that I'll go, and you'll be left stranded. We've got to make plans. You'll need money. You'll probably have to sell Skyridge. Get a job, after the baby comes. How's your shorthand?"

"They'll use vodeographs in 1977," I muttered. "But don't you worry, you cheap two-timer. Even if you succeeded in running off to mother, the baby and I'll get along. As a starter, I'm going to put the rest of your bank account on Counterpoint to win the Preakness next Saturday. After that —"

But he had already switched to something else. "When you knew me in 1977, were we — ah — intimate?"

I snorted. "Depends on who 'we' includes."

"What? You mean . . . *I* . . . and your *mother* . . . *really* . . . ?" He coughed and ran his finger around his collar. "There must be some simple explanation."

I just sneered at him.

He giggled. "Your mother — ah — in 1977 — a good-looking woman, I gather?"

"A wrinkled, painted harridan," I said coldly. "Forty, if she's a day."

"Hmph! *I'm* 40, you know. Contrary to the adolescent view, it's the best time of life. You'll feel the same way about it in another twenty years."

"I suppose so," I said. "They'll be letting me out of the penitentiary about then."

He snapped his fingers suddenly. "I've got it! Fantastic!" He turned away and looked out over the balcony, like Cortez on his peak. "Fantastic, but it hangs together. Completely logical. Me. Your mother. You. The child. The magnetrons. The eternal cycle."

"This isn't making it easier for me," I said reproachfully. "The least you could do would be to remain sane until the end."

He whirled on me. "Do you know where *she* is — now — tonight?"

"No, and I spent two-thirds of our joint bank account trying to locate her. It's just as though she never existed."

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His eyes got bigger and bigger. "No wonder you couldn't find her. You couldn't know."

"Know what?"

"Who your mother is."

I wanted to scream at him. "Oh," I said.

But he was off on another tangent. "But it's not entirely without precedent. When a cell divides, which of the resultant two cells is the mother? Which the daughter? The answer is, that the question itself is nonsense. And so with you. The cell divides in space; you divide in time. It's nonsense to ask which of you is mother, which is daughter."

I just stood there, blinking.

He rambled on. "Even so, why should I want to 'go through'? That's the only part that's not clear. Why should I deliberately skip twenty years of life with you? Who'd take care of you? How could you earn a living? But you must have. Because you didn't have to sell Skyridge. You stayed here. You educated *her*. But of course!" He smacked his fist into his palm.

"Simplest thing in the world," he howled happily. "Counterpoint at the Preakness. You'll become a professional predictor. Sports. Presidential elections. Supreme Court decisions. All in advance. You've got to *remember*. Train your ability to recall. Big money in it!"

My mouth was hanging open.

"Isn't that what happens?" he shouted.

"I know all the headlines already," I stammered. "Only that's the business *mother* started . . . predicting for a living . . ."

"Mother . . . mother . . . *mother!*" he mimicked. "By the great Chronos, child! Can't you face it? Does your mind refuse to accept the fact that you and your 'mother' and your unborn daughter are iden—"

I screamed. "No!"

I pulled out the pistol.

I raised it slowly, as though I had all the time in the world, and shot him through the head.

Even before he hit the floor I had grabbed his right hand and was flexing his fingers around the handle.

A moment later I was out the door and racing toward the garage.

I thought it would be best to "find" his body on returning from a shopping expedition in the village, where I had happened to pick up a couple of friends. The only thing wrong with this plan was that he wasn't there when I returned with my witnesses.

It was generally agreed that James McCarren had become lost in the woods while hunting. Poor fellow must have starved to death, they sup-

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posed. Neither he nor the pistol were ever found. A few months later he was declared legally dead, and I collected his insurance.

The coroner and the D.A. did give me a bad moment when they discovered some thin smudges of dried blood leading toward the edge of the balcony. But nothing turned up, of course, when they dragged the whirlpool. And when I informed them of my condition, their unvoiced suspicions turned to sympathy.

From then on, I had plenty of time to think. Particularly during the first lean months of Tomorrow, Inc., before I landed my first retainer.

And what I thought was this: what other woman ever had a man who loved her so much, even after she had shot him through the eye, that he would willingly drag himself after her, through twenty years, to claim her again, sight unseen?

The very least I could do was to drain the ravine and break your fall with this haystack.

Do you honestly like my new sun brief? The red and green checks go nicely with the yellow hay, don't they? Do you really want me to come over and sit by you? Oh, don't worry about interruptions. The servants are down in the village, and *she* won't come sneaking around through the woods for an hour yet . . . Oooh, *Johnny!*

Soap Opera, 1798

Taken from the Weekly Museum *(New York), August 11, 1798*

A correspondent informs us that a fertile genius, in the music mechanic line, has invented a washing machine, which performs several favorite airs, during the operation of purifying the foul linen. This one may suppose will prove a useful projection: as the persons so occupied may be charmed with their work, by a succession of harmonious strains: and the sense of labor, through a repetition of "Water parted from the Sea," may be relieved by "My Chloe left me in the suds."

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Isaac Asimov has written just about every kind of science fiction that you can think of (in addition to much perfectly serious straight science), from weighty sociological extrapolations to intergalactic E. Phillips Oppenheim, from a lastingly influential series on robots to the best deadpan "factual" hoax on record, from a movingly believable study of an ursine civilization to a charmingly human time-travel story without a word of science. But Mr. Asimov's versatility is by no means exhausted: this curious view of the relationship between one man and the genus Musca *is like no other story in the Asimov canon.*

Flies

by ISAAC ASIMOV

"FLIES!" said Kendell Casey, wearily. He swung his arm. The fly circled, returned and nestled on Casey's shirt-collar.

From somewhere there sounded the buzzing of a second fly.

Dr. John Polen covered the slight uneasiness of his chin by moving his cigarette quickly to his lips.

He said, "I didn't expect to meet you, Casey. Or you, Winthrop. Or ought I call you Reverend Winthrop?"

"Ought I call you Professor Polen?" said Winthrop, carefully striking the proper vein of rich-toned friendship.

They were trying to snuggle into the cast-off shell of twenty years back, each one of them. Squirming and cramming and not fitting.

Damn, thought Polen fretfully, why do people attend college reunions?

Casey's hot blue eyes were still filled with the aimless anger of the college sophomore who has discovered intellect, frustration, and the tag-ends of cynical philosophy all at once.

Casey! Bitter man of the campus!

He hadn't outgrown that. Twenty years later and it was Casey, bitter ex-man of the campus! Polen could see that in the way his finger tips moved aimlessly and in the manner of his spare body.

As for Winthrop? Well, twenty years older, softer, rounder. Skin pinker, eyes milder. Yet no nearer the quiet certainty he would never find. It was all there in the quick smile he never entirely abandoned, as though he feared

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there would be nothing to take its place, that its absence would turn his face into a smooth and featureless flush.

Polen was tired of reading the aimless flickering of a muscle's end; tired of usurping the place of his machines; tired of the too much they told him.

Could they read him as he read them? Could the small restlessness of his own eyes broadcast the fact that he was damp with the disgust that had bred mustily within him?

Damn, thought Polen, why didn't I stay away?

They stood there, all three, waiting for one another to say something, to flick something from across the gap and bring it, quivering, into the present.

Polen tried it. He said, "Are you still working in chemistry, Casey?"

"In my own way, yes," said Casey, gruffly. "I'm not the scientist you're considered to be. I do research on insecticides for E. J. Link at Chatham."

Winthrop said, "Are you really? You said you would work on insecticides. Remember, Polen? And with all that, the flies dare still be after you, Casey?"

Casey said, "Can't get rid of them. I'm the best proving ground in the labs. No compound we've made keeps them away when I'm around. Someone once said it was my odor. I attract them."

Polen remembered the someone who had said that.

Winthrop said, "Or else —"

Polen felt it coming. He tensed.

"Or else," said Winthrop, "it's the curse, you know." His smile intensified to show that he was joking, that he forgave past grudges.

Damn, thought Polen, they haven't even changed the words. And the past came back.

"Flies," said Casey, swinging his arm, and slapping. "Ever see such a thing? Why don't they light on you two?"

Johnny Polen laughed at him. He laughed often then. "It's something in your body odor, Casey. You could be a boon to science. Find out the nature of the odorous chemical, concentrate it, mix it with DDT, and you've got the best fly-killer in the world."

"A fine situation. What do I smell like? A lady fly in heat? It's a shame they have to pick on me when the whole damned world's a dung heap."

Winthrop frowned and said with a faint flavor of rhetoric, "Beauty is not the only thing, Casey, in the eye of the beholder."

Casey did not deign a direct response. He said to Polen, "You know what Winthrop told me yesterday? He said those damned flies were the curse of Beelzebub."

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"I was joking," said Winthrop.

"Why Beelzebub?" asked Polen.

"It amounts to a pun," said Winthrop. "The ancient Hebrews used it as one of their many terms of derision for alien gods. It comes from *Ba'al*, meaning *lord* and *zevuv*, meaning *fly*. The lord of flies."

Casey said, "Come on, Winthrop, don't say you don't believe in Beelzebub."

"I believe in the existence of evil," said Winthrop, stiffly.

"I mean Beelzebub. Alive. Horns. Hooves. A sort of competition deity."

"Not at all." Winthrop grew stiffer. "Evil is a short-term affair. In the end it must lose —"

Polen changed the subject with a jar. He said, "I'll be doing graduate work for Venner, by the way. I talked with him day before yesterday, and he'll take me on."

"No! That's wonderful." Winthrop glowed and leaped the subject-change instantly. He held out a hand with which to pump Polen's. He was always conscientiously eager to rejoice in another's good fortune. Casey often pointed that out.

Casey said, "Cybernetics Venner? Well, if you can stand him, I suppose he can stand you."

Winthrop went on, "What did he think of your idea? Did you tell him your idea?"

"What idea?" demanded Casey.

Polen had avoided telling Casey so far. But now Venner had considered it and had passed it with a cool, "Interesting!" How could Casey's dry laughter hurt it now?

Polen said, "It's nothing much. Essentially, it's just a notion that emotion is the common bond of life, rather than reason or intellect. It's practically a truism, I suppose. You can't tell what a baby thinks or even *if* it thinks, but it's perfectly obvious that it can be angry, frightened or contented even when a week old. See?

"Same with animals. You can tell in a second if a dog is happy or if a cat is afraid. The point is that their emotions are the same as those we would have under the same circumstances."

"So?" said Casey. "Where does it get you?"

"I don't know yet. Right now, all I can say is that emotions are universals. Now suppose we could properly analyze all the actions of men and certain familiar animals and equate them with the visible emotion. We might find a tight relationship. Emotion A might always involve Motion B. Then we could apply it to animals whose emotions we couldn't guess at by common-sense alone. Like snakes, or lobsters."

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"Or flies," said Casey, as he slapped viciously at another and flicked its remains off his wrist in furious triumph.

He went on. "Go ahead, Johnny. I'll contribute the flies and you study them. We'll establish a science of flychology and labor to make them happy by removing their neuroses. After all, we want the greatest good of the greatest number, don't we? And there are more flies than men."

"Oh, well," said Polen.

Casey said, "Say, Polen, did you ever follow up that weird idea of yours? I mean, we all know you're a shining cybernetic light, but I haven't been reading your papers. With so many ways of wasting time, something has to be neglected, you know."

"What idea?" asked Polen, woodenly.

"Come on. You know. Emotions of animals and all that sort of gug. Boy, those were the days. I used to know madmen. Now I only come across idiots."

Winthrop said, "That's right, Polen. I remember it very well. Your first year in graduate school you were working on dogs and rabbits. I believe you even tried some of Casey's flies."

Polen said, "It came to nothing in itself. It gave rise to certain new principles of computing, however, so it wasn't a total loss."

Why did they talk about it?

Emotions! What right had anyone to meddle with emotions? Words were invented to conceal emotions. It was the dreadfulness of raw emotion that had made language a basic necessity.

Polen knew. His machines had by-passed the screen of verbalization and dragged the unconscious into the sunlight. The boy and the girl, the son and the mother. For that matter, the cat and the mouse or the snake and the bird. The data rattled together in its universality and it had all poured into and through Polen until he could no longer bear the touch of life.

In the last few years he had so painstakingly schooled his thoughts in other directions. Now these two came, dabbling in his mind, stirring up its mud.

Casey batted abstractedly across the tip of his nose to dislodge a fly. "Too bad," he said. "I used to think you could get some fascinating things out of, say, rats. Well, maybe not fascinating, but then not as boring as the stuff you would get out of our somewhat-human beings. I used to think —"

Polen remembered what he used to think.

Casey said, "Damn this DDT. The flies feed on it, I think. You know, I'm going to do graduate work in chemistry and then get a job on insecti-

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cides. So help me. I'll personally get something that *will* kill the vermin."

They were in Casey's room, and it had a somewhat kerosenty odor from the recently applied insecticide.

Polen shrugged and said, "A folded newspaper will always kill."

Casey detected a non-existent sneer and said instantly, "How would you summarize your first year's work, Polen? I mean aside from the true summary any scientist could state if he dared, by which I mean: 'Nothing.' "

"Nothing," said Polen. "There's your summary."

"Go on," said Casey. "You use more dogs than the physiologists do and I bet the dogs mind the physiological experiments less. I would."

"Oh, leave him alone," said Winthrop. "You sound like a piano with 87 keys eternally out of order. You're a bore!"

You couldn't say that to Casey.

He said, with sudden liveliness, looking carefully away from Winthrop, "I'll tell you what you'll probably find in animals, if you look closely enough. Religion."

"What the dickens!" said Winthrop, outraged. "That's a foolish remark."

Casey smiled. "Now, now, Winthrop. *Dickens* is just a euphemism for *devil* and you don't want to be swearing."

"Don't teach me morals. And don't be blasphemous."

"What's blasphemous about it? Why shouldn't a flea consider the dog as something to be worshipped? It's the source of warmth, food, and all that's good for a flea."

"I don't want to discuss it."

"Why not? Do you good. You could even say that to an ant, an anteater is a higher order of creation. He would be too big for them to comprehend, too mighty to dream of resisting. He would move among them like an unseen, inexplicable whirlwind, visiting them with destruction and death. But that wouldn't spoil things for the ants. They would reason that destruction was simply their just punishment for evil. And the anteater wouldn't even know he was a deity. Or care."

Winthrop had gone white. He said, "I know you're saying this only to annoy me and I am sorry to see you risking your soul for a moment's amusement. Let me tell you this," his voice trembled a little, "and let me say it very seriously. The flies that torment you are your punishment in this life. Beelzebub, like all the forces of evil, may think he does evil, but it's only the ultimate good after all. The curse of Beelzebub is on you for *your* good. Perhaps it will succeed in getting you to change your way of life before it's too late."

He ran from the room.

Casey watched him go. He said, laughing, "I told you Winthrop believed

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in Beelzebub. It's funny the respectable names you can give to superstition." His laughter died a little short of its natural end.

There were two flies in the room, buzzing through the vapors toward him.

Polen rose and left in heavy depression. One year had taught him little, but it was already too much, and his laughter was thinning. Only his machines could analyze the emotions of animals properly, but he was already guessing too deeply concerning the emotions of men.

He did not like to witness wild murder-yearnings where others could see only a few words of unimportant quarrel.

Casey said, suddenly, "Say, come to think of it, you did try some of my flies, the way Winthrop says. How about that?"

"Did I? After twenty years, I scarcely remember," murmured Polen.

Winthrop said, "You must. We were in your laboratory and you complained that Casey's flies followed him even there. He suggested you analyze them and you did. You recorded their motions and buzzings and wing-wiping for half an hour or more. You played with a dozen different flies."

Polen shrugged.

"Oh, well," said Casey. "It doesn't matter. It was good seeing you, old man." The hearty hand-shake, the thump on the shoulder, the broad grin — to Polen it all translated into sick disgust on Casey's part that Polen was a "success" after all.

Polen said, "Let me hear from you sometimes."

The words were dull thumps. They meant nothing. Casey knew that. Polen knew that. Everyone knew that. But words were meant to hide emotion and when they failed, humanity loyally maintained the pretence.

Winthrop's grasp of the hand was gentler. He said, "This brought back old times, Polen. If you're ever in Cincinnati, why don't you stop in at the meeting-house? You'll always be welcome."

To Polen, it all breathed of the man's relief at Polen's obvious depression. Science, too, it seemed, was not the answer, and Winthrop's basic and ineradicable insecurity felt pleased at the company.

"I will," said Polen. It was the usual polite way of saying, I won't.

He watched them thread separately to other groups.

Winthrop would never know. Polen was sure of that. He wondered if Casey knew. It would be the supreme joke if Casey did not.

He *had* run Casey's flies, of course, not that once alone, but many times. Always the same answer! Always the same unpublishable answer.

With a cold shiver he could not quite control, Polen was suddenly conscious of a single fly loose in the room, veering aimlessly for a moment, then beating strongly and reverently toward Beelzebub.

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The enormously important place of advertising in our social and economic life is a sort of cultural novelty, without any exact historical precedent. Further, this self-styled acceleration of obsolescence points toward a pretty silly future. The logical Mr. Neville has managed to tear his eyes and ears from the singing commercial long enough to contemplate that future with dispassionate irony and depict a too-plausible culture of consumer demand, a society whose citizens will accept nothing, not even scientific progress, unless it is properly advertised.

It Pays to Advertise

by KRIS NEVILLE

PAUSING NOW and again to consult his dictographed notes, Ansonwald Striker, the reviewer for the *Express*, sat in his wheel chair and dictated his review.

"Professor Metaxes is a thorough scholar, of which there can be no doubt. Even in the little space he has taken (103 pages), he has displayed brilliantly the synthesis of his lines of research. However his book, *Re-examination: William Harold Smith* (Farsen, Inc., 3.), raises fully as many questions as it answers.

"That little is actually known about Smith during the crucial years is understandable when one considers the chaos that occurred during the change-over and that served to obscure the period immediately prior to it more thoroughly than any comparable period in our history. It is a regrettable but an indisputable fact that we know a great deal more about the relatively insignificant years between 1910 and 1950 than we do about the infinitely more important years between 2010 and 2050.

"No one would challenge the Professor's facts about the period. His Durocoil research unit is of proven excellence. But considering the paucity of facts available (even taking into account the recent uncoveries at Blighton), one may be forgiven for challenging some of the conclusions Professor Metaxes sees fit to arrive at.

"For instance he states (page 67): 'That Smith was personally acquainted with Raymond Anthony Parmenter is apparent from the Coby letter dated

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March 7, 2020. But that this acquaintance was of a friendly nature is not altogether clear from the context nor, surprisingly, do we have any other information as to their personal relationship. It appears, therefore, that we have as much reason for suspecting that the two men shared antipathy between them as the reverse.'

"Professor Metaxes then postulates this antipathy as the reason behind several hitherto unexplained (except for the controversial Nine Point Pronouncement which is almost undoubtedly a forgery) well documented actions on the part of Smith; the events in the summer of '20 being an example. And he points to two obscure references in the Coby letter itself, which may, I suppose, be taken as statements of extreme hostility if Professor Metaxes' debatable annotation is correct.

"But while this is a beguiling theory in many respects, it nevertheless fails to explain almost as much as it succeeds in explaining. How, then, was Parmenter able to acquire the Smith process in the first place? Why was it not placed in more congenial quarters? It has long been held that Smith gave the process to Parmenter in preference to any other Agency representative, but it would now appear, if Professor Metaxes is correct, that Smith would have acted illogically in doing so. Smith was not an illogical man. Might it not then be concluded that Smith was in reality opposed to giving the process to any Agency representative at all and that it was in some manner wrested from him by the most powerful one?

"If one were to answer this question affirmatively, it would invalidate much of Smith's character that has heretofore been agreed upon and with which Professor Metaxes, himself, agrees in broad outline — and indeed, make it appear that Smith was much less of a popular hero than is generally supposed — if not actually — at least tacitly — a supporter of the Anti-Progress Party."

Ansonwald Striker stopped dictating and leaned back.

Suppose one *were* to consider Smith as an anti-socialitarian.

He puckered his lips.

It would certainly explain a great deal. Smith's attitude toward haircuts, for instance. And it would make it plausible for the Nine Point Pronouncement to be a genuine document after all.

He experienced the mental unsettlement that went with a shift of his whole historical perspective. He shuddered delicately. Still — he considered it another minute.

There was a feeling of truth to it, all right. He imagined a scene in a biography written from that viewpoint; one scene and then another.

Had he finally written the book — doubtless in the then popular, so-called fict-biographical form — had he the passion for research-synthesis and the

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powers of historical recreation of a Metaxes, he might have presented the events in the summer of '20 somewhat as follows:

William Smith, on the nineteenth of May of that year, issued his third and somewhat ambiguous refusal to accept any payment for his process.

His rooms were on the eighth floor of the Waldheim — overlooking Center Street in the old downtown area. From the west window, which faced the distant lake front, he could watch the myriad daybright signs that lined Center and Polk as far as the eye could see in either direction.

From atop the Sebright Building the chartreuse reflecto sign read: "There *is* no Service like *human* Service," and the rotating collar between the sixth and seventh floors carried the message: "Be respected . . . Train for the profession of maid . . . Serve humanity . . . See Piper's School for Upstairs Training." Further north on Polk, outshining all the rest, was the dainty daylight purple exhortation: "See your favorite manicurist *today*."

Milling in the street below the Waldheim was a gesticulating crowd of professional pickets carrying signs reading: "We like it like we are." "You ain't God, Doc." "Smith spells unemployment." "TO HELL WITH YOU, SMITH!"

One of the guards assigned to Smith's person was seated in the corner of the living room, his chair propped against the wall, reading — or giving the appearance of reading — the now famous article in the July 2019 issue of the *Journal of Federation Biochemists:* "Selective Mutations in Genes of Mammals, an Experiment upon Twenty-one Generations of *Mus Rattus* under Laboratory Controls, by W. H. Smith, D. G. E ," which he had just a moment ago picked up from the end table.

Smith, himself — a tall wiry man with unusual and rather unsightly muscular development of the neck and forearms — was staring out the window at the sign: "Don't let a machine do it. Hire a human. Human service is more personalized."

The other guard was stationed at the door, and when the knock came, he stood up and put his hand on the knob. The daybright light from the collar below the eighth floor reflected into the room to add a colored brilliance to the pale green illumination from the overhead neon, although its message was not, of course, refracted to the wall screen. "A healthy economy is an economy based on Human Service." Nor, indeed, were there even wall screens in the apartment; their development being scarcely more than begun as early as the '20s.

The guard checked the identity of the man who had knocked, and having satisfied himself, he admitted him to the room.

"This is Mr. Hanson," he said, "of the *Daily-Star-Telegraph-Sun-News.*"

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"Ah, yes, of course, Mr. Hanson," Smith said. "Won't you sit down?"

Smith was clad in unpressed tweeds and an open collared shirt — one of his numerous Twentieth Century affectations, the total of which had before now already given rise to a considerable body of fact and fiction concerning his eccentricity. The reporter, on the other hand, was more presentably arrayed. He wore carefully engraved glasses, and his suit had all the latest handmade additions: lace, diaphanous here, opaque there, halfway between elsewhere; three-yard, silk-quilted lapels; loose-woven broad belt; and 32-button trousers. He smelled subtly of the great outdoors. His hair (in sharp contrast to Smith's horribly tousled thatch) was piled high in layer after layer of careful curls. His left eye twitched nervously, indicating that he was probably neurotic enough to need weekly sessions with his psychiatrist. In short, he, unlike Smith, was the perfectly adjusted social animal.

The reporter, after viewing the scientist with polite curiosity, gestured with an immaculate hand in a manner so as to convey a shrug and carefully placing his redi-quip camera on the table, sat down, hoisting his trouser legs with a nice solicitousness for the numerous pleats. He cleared his throat and popped a scented lozenge into his mouth.

"I wanted a picture," he said, "but I'm afraid I can't take it after all. Not with your hair that way. Not at all! It's indecent enough to lose us a great many subscribers if we ran a picture like that."

"But," Smith protested, unmoved by the reporter's obvious good intentions. "I thought a picture wouldn't be necessary. I thought you only came over to get my profit disclaimer."

"Oh, to the contrary, Doctor," the reporter explained without rancor. "You may not realize the percentage of our readers who get their news exclusively through pictures, but it is considerable."

"Well . . ." Smith said reluctantly. "If you'd give me an hour, I might be able to get something done with the hair."

Hanson glanced at his watch. "Oh, damn," he said mildly, ignoring as well as he could the implicit bad taste of the remark. "I've an appointment with my masseuse at 2. Suppose I finish up the interview right now and come back for the picture tomorrow? How would that be?"

There was a brief, muted roar in the room from the air rockets heading north to hunt up and drive over the city a cooling shower.

Smith was obviously displeased with the suggestion, for he puckered his lips sourly.

Hanson studied his nails. "Frankly, Dr. Smith," he said in a burst of magnanimity, "just between the two of us, I don't think you've got the chance God gave a goose anyhow. Working from the *Journal* article, Parmenter will have your research duplicated in a couple more months. You'll never

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get the cease and desist order against him in that time, and once he can duplicate the process, he can tie you up in court with counter-claims until doomsday. Why not just give up? 'Smith joins Parmenter, Agrees to Drop Project.' Now that would be a story."

Smith did not take the advice in the spirit in which it was given. He snorted through his nose. "I've written down my disclaimer. Here it is." He picked up a sheet of type and read: "It is my intention that all information arising from my research as described in the July, 2019 issue of the *Journal of Federal Biochemists* and all research I have later done on the same project be made freely available."

Hanson turned up the hidden knob of his hidden porto-recorder. "Fine," he said. "And now if you'll just give me a brief summary of your work again?"

"I've done that a hundred times already!" Smith said with inexcusable vexation.

"One more time, if you please, Doctor," the reporter said, stiffening his attitude at last, but still refusing to take offense at the man's conduct. "After all, we intend to publish *your* statement. I'm afraid that you don't understand that we have to keep getting fresh leads for our general copy."

"Well . . . ," Smith said wearily. Then with bitterness and very unfairly, "I don't see how your paper can do me any more harm. I suppose I may as well . . . well, you see I have been able to mutate selectively more than a dozen animal genes. And I am now able to apply this technique to the human fetus in the earliest stages of development and — just for example — produce offsprings with any given eye color . . . See here now, it's silly going over all this again!"

"Oh, now, please," Hanson pacified.

Smith actually glared at him. It was a full moment before he continued. "At the present stage there is still a great deal to learn. It may take years to be able to control even the majority of the genes. But I can safely say that my techniques will some day apply to every human hereditary characteristic. It would not only be possible to, say — as we could now — to eliminate unsightly body hair, but to effect important changes like —"

"Hold it!" Hanson said. "That's good. We can run her: 'Smith Says Hair Must Go!' "

Smith began to curse.

"No, that's quite all right. I think that's fine for today. Your profit disclaimer is the main thing anyway. Now look, you be sure to visit a tonsorium — or better yet send out for a barber right now — and I'll be in for the picture tomorrow morning."

Hanson got to his feet, picked up his camera and left, having achieved

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one of the minor reportorial victories which it was his job to achieve and for which his paper was justly renowned.

Smith sat motionless in his chair, muttering to himself bitterly.

His very posture seemed to proclaim that here was a man indifferent to social pressures. There was an inherent rudeness and truculence in his bearing. Although his face was superficially kindly and his eyes were intelligent, there was something basically insensitive about the face, something that implied a lack of good taste, a callous disregard for the welfare of the common man.

"I'll get their damned haircut," he said after a while.

The guard at the door smiled approval. "I'll phone a barber."

"I'll go out," Smith said.

"I'll phone a cab, then," the guard said.

"I want to walk," Smith said.

There was a stunned silence. It was just past midday, and the sun was shining hotly on the streets. The guard in the chair that was leaning against the wall came down heavily. "Walk?"

"Yes, damn it, walk. What's wrong with walking?"

" 'What's wrong with walking?' he says," said the guard at the door

The two guards stared at the biologist.

Smith, with one of his frequent boorish remarks, said, "To hell with both of you. Stay here if you want to."

"Aw . . ." one of the guards said. "You know we got our orders."

Smith started for the door. Shrugging, the two guards followed him into the corridor with very good grace considering their provocation.

The floor attendant came off the sofa with a half bow. "May I be of service, sir?" he said to Smith.

"No," Smith said curtly. "I'm going out."

"May I call you an air cab, then?"

"We're walking," Smith said.

"Walking?" the attendant said. "If you want exercise, sir, the hotel masseur is on call. If you want fresh air, isn't your outdoor ventilation working in the apartment? We have excellent cold mountain air, today, smelling of snow and pine needles. The Service operator will gladly arrange it."

"We'll walk."

Taken aback, the attendant reached up and examined the bridge of his nose, adjusting his glasses as an afterthought. "I see," he said. His cheeks puffed and he cleared his throat. "I'll ring for the elevator."

"We'll *walk* down."

The guards blushed and made embarrassed gestures.

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But Smith, ignoring their discomfiture, was already jogging down the stairs, which were shiny and unaccustomed to human feet.

The guards followed.

Below the second landing, Smith passed a cleaning maid who was polishing the brass hand rail. She looked up and stared at Smith's head of hair and smiled pityingly. "Is he dangerous?" she whispered to one of the guards as he came abreast of her.

It was easy enough getting out of the hotel undetected. The pickets had forgotten — or did not know of — the underground to Beke's restaurant. Smith and the guards merely got in the tiny electric car and rode to relative safety. After they came out of Beke's, the guards kept anxious watch on the pickets, who surged before the Waldheim, muttering angrily, their glasses glinting dully in the lights.

Before they had gotten two blocks from the restaurant, they saw the *Daily-Star-Telegraph-Sun-News* extra delivered by cab-drop to the corner of Polk and Wilshire.

They could see the screaming headlines. ALL BALD SAYS BIOLOGIST!

The newshawk — saving for Smith and his guards — was the only one abroad to read the copy, but since only the front pages of the pound and a quarter, ad-filled newspapers had been changed for the extra, the edition could scarcely be called an extravagance.

The newshawk watched the men curiously as they came toward him.

Cabs whizzed by overhead; the sun shone warmly; and the streets were clean and dustless and silent.

The newshawk waited until they had crossed Wilshire. Then he stepped into the middle of the sidewalk, directly in Smith's path. He was dressed in a beautiful, hand-embroidered gown of sheerest silk which rustled sleepily. He smelled of gun powder and axle grease: *essence l'homme.*

"Ain't I seen your picture?" he demanded. "Ain't you that Smith character?"

Smith tried to brush him aside.

"Listen, Smith, what you want to rock the boat for?"

Smith stepped around him and continued down Polk.

The newshawk followed.

"Look at the papers!" he cried. "Ain't you ashamed? There's mobs demonstrating against you all over the city — preachers preaching against you. Ain't you *ashamed?* Why don't you crawl in a hole?"

Smith began to walk faster.

"Who do you think you are, I want to know? The editorials say you'd make us like insects, if you had your way. Who do you think you are to tell us what we're going to be like?"

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"Okay, okay," one of the guards spoke kindly. "Let him alone."

"You see!" the newshawk cried. "You've even got to have government men follow you around so somebody don't shoot you!"

Smith turned into one of the city phone booths and very uncivilly slammed the door on the newshawk, who, after a few moments, reluctantly returned to his post at the corner.

Smith put a coin into the box and pressed for the intown operator. He gave her the number of Franklin Finweister.

Finweister — from whose name is derived the opprobrious expression, finweisterism — came on the circuit after a slight delay.

"Yes," he said oilily.

"Have you seen the papers?" Smith asked. "They had me again."

"Just looking at one," Finweister said. "It's a shame, but . . ."

"I told you public opinion is getting out of hand."

"Take it easy, boy."

"Parmenter's behind it."

"So he is, so he is," Finweister agreed, "but our support's still strong, too. I've talked another commentator around to our side, and he hasn't lost his sponsor yet. He said yesterday afternoon that you've opened whole new vistas to mankind."

"But Parliament won't be back for the emergency session for two weeks, and maybe by then Parmenter will be able to influence enough votes, with public pressure running like it is, to . . ."

"I'm working on Edwards. I think he'll agree to propose our legislation. The tide hasn't turned in Parmenter's favor yet."

"Listen, Frank, how can we be sure? He's kept us from getting the Presidential injunction lifted. Time's on his side. I'm scared. Maybe if we could sit down and talk it over with that bastard again we might get *something* out of him before it's too late."

"I don't think it would do any good."

"But if Parliament doesn't act damned quick he'll have us tied up in a court fight that'll last until he's sure he's brought public opinion around."

Finweister grunted.

"Let me try once more," Smith pleaded. "Can you arrange another meeting?"

". . . if you say so. But I don't like it."

"Let's make one last try! And if it doesn't work, I'll come out with a firm endorsement of your group — even if becoming an open partisan will decrease the effectiveness of my testimony at Parliamentary hearings."

"I'll phone you back."

After Finweister hung up, Smith phoned his fiancée, Dorothy. While he

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was waiting for her to come to the phone, he overheard some of her parents' understandably provoked remarks. "That bum again . . . Why couldn't she have taken up with a custom launderer or artist tailor or something worth while . . . I won't have that man in this house!" Smith slammed down the receiver before Dorothy answered.

Muscles were rippling in his jaw as he left the phone booth. He had never learned to take criticism kindly and he snapped, "Let's go," angrily at the innocent guards.

They walked on to the tonsorium.

The door attendant greeted them with raised eyebrows, but he said nothing to reflect on Smith's appearance or on their mode of locomotion.

Once inside the door, having made his want known, Smith was beset by helping hands, peeling off his coat, whisking his trousers, air-blowing his shirt — and presently, releasing him, the attendants stepped back, smiling.

"This way, sir."

"Ah," said the barber as Smith entered the cubicle. "Ah," he said again with mounting enthusiasm. The guards were stationed outside the door.

As Smith advanced, the barber shrugged his sleeves up over his wrists. He waved his hand gracefully toward the chair.

"What hair!" he said. "Professionally speaking, what absolutely wonderful hair!"

Smith sat down. "Just once over lightly."

"Ha, ha," laughed the barber good humoredly. "He brings a head of hair like this in and says, 'Once over lightly.' This head is a good two hour job, and he says, 'Once over lightly.' Indeed, two hours at the least. Now, our fall styles . . ."

"I'm rather in a hurry," Smith snapped.

The barber narrowed his eyes and sniffed delicately. Whistling tunelessly, he laid out a row of instruments.

Then: squirt-squirt.

The barber beamed. Smith smelled of nasturtium and sea spray. The barber put the atomizer back on the shelf.

"There," he said. "Now you smell nice."

The chair curved to Smith's body, tightened, relaxed, began to ripple soothingly.

"Shut that damned thing off!" Smith ordered.

"Sir!" said the barber, shocked. But he obeyed.

"Hold your head still, please."

Clip-clip went the scissors.

Smith's hand was taken by the female attendant. Snip-snip, and his unsightly fingernails began to come away.

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Swish-swish, and his scuffed shoes were being polished to a high shine by practiced hands.

"Throw those other people out," Smith said. "I just want a haircut."

There were gasps and rustlings.

The barber cleared his throat. One by one the tidying personnel departed, indignant, but politely mute.

Smith groaned with boredom.

Gingerly the barber went back to his work.

"Curled?" the barber said eventually.

"No," Smith said.

"But it's the style this season, sir."

"No."

"Ah . . ." said the barber conversationally. "You've been away from civilization for some time?"

"Of course not," Smith said.

When the haircut was over with, Smith went back to his apartment and began working on one of the genetic problems.

At 4 o'clock just after the shower — which had been somewhat too light to cool the city properly — Finweister phoned that the Parmenter conference had been set for next Friday week.

That was the first Friday in June. It was also the day the Parliament met for its first emergency session. It was also the day of a partial eclipse of the sun at 2:27, and the day the Wilmington Nargansers won 19–7 over Plumripe's Queens.

In the interest of secrecy, the conference was arranged for 7 o'clock in the evening at the home of G. Perdue (professor emeritus of John's) at Baxter, a place, if we are to believe contemporary accounts, almost impossible to find, situated a quarter of a mile or so from the junction of Alternate 7 with Wilksway, on the very lip of the wheat plains then under cultivation and extending for nearly 70 miles in the direction of Monksburg.

There was unusually heavy traffic in the Alternate 7 flight lane, because to the east a transcontinental had force-landed and burned. But in spite of the ambulance traffic, Smith and his guards and Finweister arrived early.

Parmenter was already there in the living room, drinking brandy with the host.

Smith stationed his guards in the main hall and Perdue retired to his study.

Parmenter was smiling and friendly, radiating his pleasant self confidence; Smith was nervous and ill at ease.

"Well, well, well, well," said Parmenter heartily. He chuckled. "Imagine hairless people like those rats you wrote about. Oh dear, the things you

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want to do to our economy." Parmenter was a jolly, round-faced little man with an air of sweet reasonableness about him and a suppressed twinkle in his eyes.

"Let's cut out the humor and get down to business."

"Business? Why, of course, my dear boy."

"Now look," Smith said. "I'm a scientist. I figure how things work. That's my only angle."

Finweister nodded.

Parmenter glanced disapprovingly at Smith's companion.

"I know, for instance," Smith continued, "that the human female is not adapted to walking upright and that in two generations we could provide her with a better skeleton and with a better arrangement of organs. There are endless functional disorders that can be changed by mutation."

"Tut, tut," Parmenter reproved. "Throw people out of work, you mean. Throw doctors, nurses, dentists, psychiatrists out of work."

"Eliminate the need for them," Smith said somewhat dryly.

"Now, now, Harold. Now, tut, tut. Let's be sensible about this . . . There are forces," he said, glancing darkly at Finweister, "in our dear country who like to see young men like you express just such sentiments, who like to mislead you into believing just such — well, Harold, I know you'll excuse me putting it bluntly — just such nonsense. UnAmerican people, Harold. Isn't that correct . . . Mr. Finweister?"

Finweister was left without words, but he growled angrily under his breath to conceal the wound left by the candid remarks.

"Haven't we got more of this so-called science than is good for progress already?" Parmenter asked. "Why, dear me, look what it's done to our factories! Robbed all our working men of their jobs. We've had to put everybody to work in the service industries, and now *you* want to come along and take that over, too. You don't want to leave us any work to do. And then how could we eat, I want to know? How could we afford to, Harold?"

There was no answer to that devastating question, and Smith squirmed uncomfortably in his seat. "We could adjust to it," he said.

"Ah, me, the miseries, the miseries of the technological reaction. You don't realize, you don't realize at all." His eyes twinkled good naturedly, expressing the thought without bitterness that a scientist has absolutely no concept of the only true science — economics. Where, indeed, unusual skill, training, intelligence and perspicacity are requisite to even an elementary understanding. "Imagine what would happen. Hairless men and women! Why, in a single stroke you would completely destroy our market for shampoo, razor blades, depilatories, eyebrow pencils, after-shave lotions, antiseptic sticks, hair dye, pin curlers, wigs, moustache wax, hair oil,

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dandruff remover, scalp refresher . . ." He shuddered. "Harold, we of the advertising world have spent the best years of our lives building up most of that market. It's part of the great American tradition, and here you come along and want to throw millions of loyal, patriotic men and women out of their jobs, just on an ill-considered whim."

"No more bad breath, no more bad teeth, no more B. O.!" Smith said.

"Please, please, *please*," said Parmenter, pained deeply. "You've already cost us a million dollars worth of confusion. The market broke at noon, just as Parliament was called to order, and Service workers are threatening to strike, and their . . ." He let his voice die out. He leaned forward in the chair. "But Harold. There is no need for recriminations — no, we are two intelligent men sitting here in Professor Perdue's living room. We are too *big*, Harold, for these petty considerations."

"Watch him," Finweister said. "He's slimy."

With innate dignity and nobility of character, Parmenter ignored the remark.

"Let's have it," Smith said.

"Well, my boy," Parmenter said, standing up and going to the biologist's chair and placing a fatherly hand on his shoulder, "I know you came here tonight to see if you couldn't arrange some sort of compromise with us, before the Parliament passes laws making your whole process illegal. You're worried, Harold, and you should be."

"You're the one that's worried," Finweister snapped. "You know we've got you over a barrel and you're ready to talk some sense for a change. Otherwise, you wouldn't be here."

"Our Socialitarian Movement," Parmenter continued, ignoring the interruption, "is preparing the legislation even as we're talking here tonight."

"But you didn't manage to wean away Edwards," Finweister said with a smirk. "I've got his commitment in writing, and he's introducing our bill Monday."

Parmenter was visibly shaken. He seemed to have lost control of himself and of the trend of his thoughts. "Edwards?" he whispered. "That's a lie!" he said hoarsely, letting his hand fall limply away from Smith's shoulder. "In writing?"

And then quickly he regained his composure. "Now, surely you don't think Edwards has any influence. Surely you don't think . . . ?"

"Let's go," Finweister said. "He's licked and he knows it. I told you we shouldn't have bothered to come."

Finweister made to rise.

"No!" Parmenter said, imploringly.

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Smith was making "hushing" gestures in the direction of Finweister.

"No! Wait! Gentlemen! I . . . Until you told me this, I . . . well, I'm not a poker player, gentlemen. I can't bluff."

"You knew damned well that you hadn't got Edwards."

"No, not a word. Not a word of it came to my ears. In writing? I understood that he was ready to go along with us." Parmenter blinked his eyes. "Until the moment you spoke, I thought we had a majority. Frankly, gentlemen, I'm shaken. Give me a moment." He walked over and poured himself a brandy. "You are a clever man, Mr. Finweister. You are far too clever for a businessman like me." He poured another brandy. "I congratulate you, sir. If what you say is true, and if you say it, sir, I'm satisfied that it is . . ." His voice broke. "Well, frankly, gentlemen, we must face it," he sobbed. "We're licked. You were too fast for us. We're ready to capitulate. We're ready to give in. We're beat." Tears ran down his cheeks in a display of anguish that would have moved to compassion the very stone paper weight on the desk. "All we can ask now is the scraps, the crumbs, the merest leftovers . . . You know as well as I do what this means. The people will come to hate us. We will be persecuted. History will ridicule us. It is abysmal . . . Let us salvage something, gentlemen. Do not leave us to this." He sighed. "We only want to serve. That has always been and always will be our only aim. We are willing to assist you in every way we can — money — publicity . . ." He put his head in his hands. His body shook with emotion.

Smith called Finweister aside. "What do you make of it?"

"Damned if I know."

"Is it possible that he really thought Edwards would come out for him?"

"I'm not sure. I thought — but I don't know. Maybe he did."

"Look," said Smith. "How much were you bluffing about the rest? Have we still got enough votes?"

Finweister shrugged.

"Can we afford to tell him to go to hell? Can we take the chance?"

"I don't know for sure that they can't get their prohibition through. It will depend upon the debate and the grass root reaction, which seems to be running against us heavier every minute."

Parmenter was pacing the floor. "Well?" he said. "Tell me — tell me the worst."

"Just what did you have in mind?" Smith said.

Parmenter slumped defeatedly into a chair. "Whatever you say. We know when we're licked."

Finweister and Smith looked at each other.

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"I understand," Parmenter said, "that you have a Nine Point Program that you want to put into legislation and that you want the government to finance. But you know what happens whenever the government finances anything. They put all kinds of strings on it. Listen, this is too important to put into anyone's hands but yours. As long as it's got to be, you're the only man we can *trust* with it."

"Well?"

"I just thought of this. Suppose the Advertising Council gives you a research grant — no strings attached. Suppose the Council agrees to set up clinics for mutation all over the country. Suppose we pay all these expenses. It would give us the chance to continue to serve the people, to retain their good will . . . to salvage a little . . ."

Finweister and Smith withdrew a few feet again.

"We better get him to sign something before the shock wears off," Finweister whispered. "It looks like he *thinks* he's beat, all right."

They came back.

"Are you empowered to act for your body?"

"Yes. Oh, yes, indeed. I can go as high as 5,000,000 a year for research and 5,000,000 a year for clinics."

"Let's put it on paper."

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," said Parmenter. With shaking hands he dicto-typed: "The Council of Advertising of America hereby agrees to pay $5,000,000 per annum to the charitable trust of the name Smith Genetics Research Foundation for use as said Foundation sees fit in the development of the so-called Smith Process for the purpose of applying the results of the research to mankind. And furthermore, provides to pay an equal amount yearly for the establishment and administration of clinics to bring any benefits from the research to all the people. . . ." He shut off the machine. "Regardless of race, creed, or national origin?"

"Certainly," Smith said.

Parmenter wrote that and then continued: "Freely, or for a nominal fee, provided that no parents be coerced into having their children mutated in any manner save as they expressly request." He stopped again. "That's to protect us all," he explained. "In case something should happen to you and the Foundation fall into less trustworthy hands."

"Fine," said Finweister.

"For such a period until the financial obligations," Parmenter went on, "of this agreement are assumed by another agency, or the contract and agreement is terminated by mutual consent. It is binding upon both parties to fulfil their stated obligations under this contract or to suffer the penalties provided by law and that in the event of forfeiture . . ."

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When they had finished, they called in the host. He witnessed the signing of the document.

"It's a load off my conscience, gentlemen," Parmenter said. "It is the least we can do. We recognize that you would have beaten us. We submit gracefully. We only give money, which is little enough, while you, Dr. Smith, have given the process and the whole of your life's research. I am proud to join with you in this."

They shook hands all around and had a drink.

Then Smith and Finweister, writhed in smiles and aglow with self satisfaction, returned to town.

"When this document is published," Finweister promised, "the Parliament will go home the next day, and they'll be damned glad to get off the hook. And, by God, I'm still not sure they'd have gone our way."

Laughing heartily, they parted.

When Smith awoke the next morning, he phoned the press, and when the reporters were assembled in his living room, he issued his infamous Nine Point Pronouncement, or Mutation Credo, beginning: "All mutations will have the various aims of increasing the health of all the members of the race of man, of increasing the intelligence of all the members of the race of man, etc. . . ."

Four hours later Smith bought a paper to read the coverage given his pronouncement. The headline read: SMITH REFUSES GOVERNMENT CONTROL. And the lead story was captioned: "No Dictatorial Tyranny In Administration. To Be Impartial, Says Smith."

On the second page he saw the page-sized, full color ad of the Advertising Council.

Freely and to all ONLY *as they so require and* ONLY *to the degree they require!*

Start Planning Your New Family Now!
Only YOU can chose.

Send for our free, 64 page booklet entitled, *The New Man Of The Future*, which discusses such interesting and vital subjects as: What figure will best fit future styles and What non-useful features are necessary to heighten attractiveness to the opposite sex?

IF YOU WANT YOUR CHILD TO HAVE THE BEST,
SEND FOR YOUR FREE BOOKLET TODAY!

Smith found his announcement beyond the editorial attacking it, somewhat back in the paper, on page 83. It was a very fair write-up, pro and con, taking up almost all of the left-hand column.

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The next day he married Dorothy, and wrote — actually using an old fashioned manual pen — the last letter of which we have record: a request to a steamship line for a stateroom for his wife and himself. Since steamship lines were traditionally for newlyweds, it has long been thought that he intended only to take a brief honeymoon to the South Pacific Islands, but it can now be reasonably concluded from the new understanding of his character and from the fact that nothing further is available about him in English, that he did not return to America. Which only adds another unpleasant facet to his already unsavory character: he was a bad loser.

Ansonwald Striker requested the dictograph to play back his last paragraph.

"If one were to answer the question affirmatively, it would invalidate much of Smith's character that has heretofore been agreed upon and with which Professor Metaxes, himself, agrees in broad outline — and indeed, make it appear that Smith was much less of a popular hero than is generally supposed — if not actually — at least tacitly — a supporter of the Anti-Progress Party."

Ansonwald Striker resumed dictation.

"We would then be forced to give Parmenter a pre-eminent place in our hierarchy of national heroes and demote Smith to secondary importance if not drop him altogether.

"It would be Parmenter's — not Smith's — extreme cleverness that was responsible for outwitting the finweisterian anti-socialitarians and adopting the process to the end of perpetuating the economy."

Ansonwald Striker paused. He sat scrunched up and satisfactorily helpless in the chair and needful of all the attention he could get. Wearily he punched a button for the servant, who was mostly all arms and legs, to come wheel the chair to the window so that he might relax his mind by watching the sunset.

And his long, long *beautiful* hair!

He would always be grateful to his mother for that. But of course it *would* mat up terribly even in a slight breeze.

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Bruce Agnew is one of the youngest of the hitherto-unpublished authors whom F&SF has discovered — and one of the most original, as you'll see in this succinct narrative of a new kind of interstellar discovery.

The Key

by BRUCE A. AGNEW

THE LINGUIST LOOKED at the book before him on the table, then back at his assistant. "We've almost got it, Harry." He opened the book, stared at the strange hieroglyphs, and smiled. "We've almost got it." Success was near — and the linguist knew it. But strangely he couldn't concentrate on the translating today; his mind was not on his work. It was thousands of light years away, on his home planet, on Earth.

He could still remember his childhood days, his fascination with the history of ancient man's first conquest of space. He remembered reading of the excitement men had felt when first they reached the other planets of their solar system, and their disappointment when they failed to find remains of intelligent life. He recalled stories of the celebrations which had greeted the first ship to return from outer space when, centuries later, man had finally reached the stars. But that had been long ago, and nowhere had man found another planetary system. Gradually, interest in the stars had died, for men grew bored with searching in vain for other worlds — so bored that the discovery, ten years earlier, of a planetary system had caused only the barest ripple of surprise, and all but a few soon lapsed into their former lives, in a world almost void of progress. All but a few. A few had listened to the discoverers of this new sun, listened to their tales, to their descriptions of the ruined cities, the hollow buildings and empty streets, the remains of a dead civilization, perhaps one that had paralleled Earth's own. They had listened, and thought, and planned. And from their plans had sprung this expedition.

A strange expedition it was, not at all as the ancients had envisioned an exploration of outer space. The adventurers, the glory-seekers, had been left behind. It was an expedition of linguists, sent millions of miles through the veil of space to translate the records of a race which had been born, and which apparently had died, long before man became ruler of the Earth.

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For a year they had toiled beneath the strange sun, trying to read meaning into the few books which had been found, after much searching, on this lifeless world. And for most of that time they had been unsuccessful. Eight months of failure dragged by, and then they uncovered what appeared to be a child's alphabet book. It took two months for the most brilliant of Earth's linguists to read what a child of this dead race would have scanned in fifteen minutes; but it was a start, a foothold.

The strange language began to unfold itself. Words, phrases lost their mystery. One by one, the scratches took on meaning. The linguists focused their attention on one book, translating every symbol they recognized, trying to draw sense from those whose meaning still eluded them. Steadily their vocabulary increased, as they drew ever nearer to success. But it was slow. The language would not surrender its secrets easily. It was slow.

The linguist scanned the page of once senseless scratches. A few, now, were familiar to him. A very few. But somehow he felt that, today . . .

"We're almost there, Harry." He looked at his assistant. "We've almost hit it." He turned back to the book. "Well, let's get on with the work. What have we got on page one?"

The assistant flipped his notebook back to the first page. He scanned it quickly. "Not much. The fourth word is the name of a local deity. The tenth word seems to be the name of this planet. The thirtieth . . ."

"Never mind — we'll concentrate on the first sentence. Let's see . . ." He stared at the page, at times referring to the child's alphabet, then searching for a word or phrase in the "dictionary" which the linguists had compiled. Finally he leaned back. "I think I've got it. Take this down." The assistant grabbed his notebook. "Mmm . . . *first*, or maybe *beginning* . . . next term is the name of their deity . . . this looks like *built*, maybe *assembled* . . . *sky*, *clouds* is all I can get for the next one . . . then comes the name of this planet . . . it's repeated . . . I can't make a thing out of the next term. . . ." He looked up. His assistant had stopped writing. "What's the matter?" The assistant stared at him. "What's wrong?"

"It sounds like . . . like . . . ."

"Well?"

"It sounds like *In the beginning God created the heavens and the* . . . ." His voice sank to a whisper.

The linguist stared down at the page. "It is," he said slowly.

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Young writers seeking a formula for quick success will get little help from Mr. Pederson's account of the events leading up to the sale of this grim tale of summer madness. Seems Mr. Pederson first wrote it when he was fourteen, forgot about it, rewrote it, forgot it again, finally settled down and finished the present version when he was seventeen. In taking three years to write a single story the dilatory Mr. Pederson sets no good (or lucrative) example for his fellow aspirants. But there's nothing lackadaisical about his chronicle of a small town boy who didn't realize that the dog days are no time to fool around with voodoo.

The August People

by CON PEDERSON

It was a summer day in the town, and Wallace walked into the drug store and sat down and said whew the way he had said it on countless other Sunday afternoons.

The heat was nervous; little shivering pools of it drifted about. It chased after Wallace every Sunday and then it hung outside the drug store, chasing boys on bicycles or women with books in their hands. But it never followed him in.

"Miss Willow, I love you. Will you marry me?" Wallace said.

The girl at the soda bar laughed (and it always sounded like a singer laughing; not that he had ever heard a singer laugh like that or laugh at all, but surely it must be like that). "I'm afraid my husband might object."

It was a dialogue, always the same. It made a strange painful echo into the back of his mind. Sundays rippled past his memory, like the heat, and her voice flowed over it again and again. It was a great wonderful joke that they both had to smile after and laugh after because it was so *funny*. But Wallace's weak smile faded as he fondled the malted milk she slid over to him. He pointed at its brown sandpaper surface with a soda straw.

"There is your husband down there, Miss Willow. *Miss* Willow. Here are his eyes and here is his nose. His ears and his mouth. His bald head rolling like a cue ball on his shoulders, his bow tie supporting it and catching the sweat of the Sundays as he stands in the doorway watching people walk by."

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She looked down at the glass, wiping a coffee cup. She put the cup on its hook, decided it was wrong, and moved it over two pegs. She looked back at the glass.

Wallace pushed the straw down into the malt and stirred. The face became a spiral. It was a clock spring, unwound, dead.

A man came in and walked to the back room.

"Hello, dear," said Miss Willow.

"Hello, Mr. Granislauer," mumbled Wallace to the suddenly ruined malt.

"Oh look!" said Miss Willow. "Joe brought a Christmas tree!"

"He sure didn't pay any attention to you. What kind of a hus — Christmas tree! Is that what you said, Miss Willow? A Christmas tree?"

"Yes! When we were married he said to me, 'Susie, when it's summertime and hot and sizzling out I'm going to walk in the store with a Christmas tree. Won't you be surprised?' "

"What a fool."

"I think it's clever."

She watched Joe Granislauer emerge with the tree again and start setting it up in the big display window of the front counter, occasionally glancing out at the August People.

That's what he called them. He stepped over to Miss Willow and Wallace and said, "Those people are all August People. But what happens when they see this tree? Only December People have Christmas trees. They'll go mad." He chuckled.

Wallace pretended to be drinking his malt, evading the sweaty baldness of Joe's head, hanging over the counter like a swollen moon, reddened and hot, just off the horizon of sun glasses and bromos and cokes.

December People, he thought. Bad enough having this lug around, standing near Susie Willow, blotting her and looking like a brick by an orchid in his victory. Then the ham face bent lower and a slab of hand nudged Wallace. "Pretty tricky, hah?"

Wallace blinked and frowned. "I suppose there're September People and February People and April People too. And if an April fellow landed in October he'd be pretty put out, huh?"

Joe laughed and sounded like a camel, big and echoing with his laugh. Or was it more like a grunt, telling Wallace he was trying to laugh but couldn't; just grinning with a knife in his hand sort of. Was that it?

"Pretty sharp. Yuh, ya got the idea."

He grunted over to his Christmas tree. He started to hang things on it.

Susie bent down to the face over the malt glass.

"He told me about it. He wants to see the look on their faces when they come in, the middle of August, with the heat and the streets and buildings

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and sky all August, and then they see the tree . . . Oh, he's plotted it, he has. He'll get such a kick out of seeing that *expression.*"

Wallace sat there, mooding over the malt and hating Joe. "Miss Willow . . . ," he said, stirring the malt. Suddenly there was a circle in the liquid, and he idly began to poke features in it, as before. "Miss Willow, since I've been out of a job, I've been reading books."

"I'm so happy for you, Wally," she giggled.

"But these," he said, pushing in the eyes and trying to retain the melting nose, "are a special *kind* of books."

"Oh."

"Yes. You might, ahh, say I've been *studying* them."

"Oh? What are they?"

Wallace jabbed the straw into the second face, viciously. "*Voodoo*," he answered, standing up.

"Oh my!"

"*Owtch!*" said Joe.

"Oh *my!*"

"Good afternoon, Miss Willow." Wallace marched out.

Susie glided over to where Joe was fumbling around. Her hinged ankles darted back and forth inside her skirt, swishing.

"What's the trouble, Joe?"

He exposed a reddened eye. "Awwr, I poked myself in the eye with one of those branches. Stood up too quick, I guess."

Wallace walked swiftly along the warming streets. It was Monday, along about the time when the sun was clear of all the tallest buildings and trees and had plenty of room to heat up in. It made people take off their coats and squint up and curse the sun, just as they cursed the cold in winter.

Wallace thought about that. "The August People are too hot and the December People are too cold. That's the difference. Why, how much happier they could be if they were to change places!"

He turned a corner, grinning with such an inspiration, as if it made fun of Joe Granislauer; stood him up in public and let the August People hand him glasses of ice water and the December People give him hot water bottles, and they'd hang trimmings from his fat branches and put presents under him and dance around. Then everybody would be singing and screaming *White Christmas* and then they'd dump confetti on him.

Just then he nearly ran into some people riding a tandem bike and jumped back. But they didn't move. He looked again and recognized the Coca Cola ad, grinning at him. He leered back, just to be mean. It was the drug store. He went in and sat down at his customary stool.

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Susie Willow wasn't in, just the week-day waitress, who served him a limeade. He sat and watched Joe at the back of the store, so proud of his Christmas tree.

Wallace watched the ice shavings in his glass, like icebergs. He thought of smug Joe, hovering by the cosmetics like a child with a new toy. He felt oddly good himself.

Soon a customer came in. Joe lit up, came alive, and he sprang to the soda bar, watching every line and wrinkle of Mrs. Beenum's face. It was like a putty mask, fragile and carved and all thin, ready to break down like fluttering leaves that hover and sink to the ground at the mention of death.

She glanced at the magazine racks. Her lips were like pencil lines, just more creases in her face. She walked on toward the bar, approaching the tree at the first counter.

She had that look all old ladies have; that detached quality that made Wallace wonder if she even suspected the presence of life in the store — much less that it watched her every move breathlessly.

The tree hung over her, behind the glass. Her head went upward, her eyes swung from the tops of her black shoes, upward, and then! She looked at the glass, no, *through* it, right *through* it and saw Joe's paling face beyond!

"My, but it's going to be another hot one out today, Mr. Granislauer."

Wallace watched her mouth making the sounds and smiling. The friendly old lady sat down and actually ordered a coke, while Wallace felt Joe's incredible stare, which had followed her every movement.

She hadn't seen the tree.

Joe was standing by the first counter now, his big hand up and resting on the glass case. Wallace could feel his mind reaching and crawling — "Look, see my hand, see it? See where it's pointing? See — see the Christmas tree? *The Christmas tree?*"

Mrs. Beenum rose and took a frail handkerchief from her tiny purse and patted her lips and walked toward the door. Joe stood there, practically blocking her way.

"Well, hope it's hot enough for you," she said, smiling as she walked out.

Joe nearly fell through the case.

He walked away muttering, "But she didn't even *see* it . . . she looked right through the tree. I — I —"

Wallace looked down at his glass. "Maybe somebody put a hex on it." The icebergs were gone. So was the limeade. So was Wallace.

When Wallace came in at 5 o'clock that evening the August People were just beginning to feel cool again. The drug store smelled fresh and clean, and Susie Willow was back on duty, worrying about her husband.

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Wallace sipped a soda. "I love you," he said.

"Wally, I'm really worried about Joe. He's been gone for over an hour. He walked out muttering something about the heat. It was cool in here, because the air coolers have been going all day. Katie said that people were coming in all the time, and they would buy things or just look at the magazines, and they'd sweat and sometimes they'd wish it were Christmas and look up and laugh — but Wally, they never saw the tree. . . ."

She sat down behind the counter and folded her hands.

"And Katie said that every time someone came in Joe would look up with a happy kind of expression as if the next might stop and look pale and say 'Oh my! A Christmas tree! But they never did, and Joe kept getting more and more uncomfortable and kept complaining about the awful heat."

"Yes," slurped Wallace. "The heat."

"Katie said you were here . . . where've you been afterwards?"

"I — uh — I studied."

There was a strained silence, as Wallace slurred at the bottom of his soda and Susie Willow stared out the door, wondering about Joe. Wallace thought about the things he'd often wanted to say to Susie, nice things, from his memories of the sweet girl of his high school days. But he could never get the words right in his mouth. He had always been a little late.

"How come you didn't order your usual malt?" asked Susie, awkwardly trying to keep out the silence.

"Well . . . I didn't feel like one. I — had four today."

"Why, why on earth?" asked Susie, amazed.

"The heat. You know, the heat. I was in here several times."

"My gracious."

She started to wipe a dry glass, absently. "Didn't you run into Joe at all?"

"Not exactly," Wallace replied.

"What do you mean?"

"No . . . I haven't seen him this afternoon."

"Wally, Miss Thomasby said she saw Joe coming out of the store about 3:30 while I was still getting home from up town. She said he was sweating all over, and when she said hello he just said, 'August Lady' and walked on, and he kept muttering about the heat. Not exactly saying it, just muttering and muttering. She said he looked awful bad."

Wallace could imagine Joe stumbling along, crushed by the heat. He thought of a fat doll on a hot plate up in his room.

"Where was he headed, Susie?"

"Why — east, I think she said. Towards the river."

Wallace fished out a quarter. Something was whirring around inside his head, and he began to be afraid.

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"Susie . . . ," he said, "Susie, do you know about Voudoun ritual — all that stuff like they have in Haiti?"

"Why — you mean voodoo? Like the books you've been reading? Why, it's just a lot of dancing and things, isn't it?"

"Yes, but — uh — it originally had something to do with sorcery. You know, dark mysterious Africa and all that. Well, I've been sorta — experimenting . . ."

Susie clutched at her dishtowel. Suddenly Wallace rose and ran out the door. Outside, the sky had become very gray, and little whiffs of dust bowled along the street. A summer storm was rising.

". . . It worked! Oh, no, no — I was just kidding," he thought desperately as he ran toward River Drive. Turning at the corner, he dashed out over a vacant lot, crossed a boardwalk and gazed down from the high west bank of the river, into the lazy flow of the dark water below.

He stood, not knowing what to do. Finally, without direction, he turned and wandered back along River Drive. He accepted the grim situation — voodoo had actually worked.

Finding himself back in his room as the storm broke, he thumbed through a book entitled, *Primitive Beliefs And Practice* until he came to a page where several paragraphs had been encircled. He read for the rest of the evening, the rain and the thunder crawling inside his head. Finally, about midnight, restless and afraid to go to sleep, he experimented with conjuring. After several unenthusiastic efforts he threw the chalk across the room and sank back into a troubled sleep.

It was two days before Wallace went down to the drug store again. The sun was high and all signs of the rainstorm had gone, as the summer heat once more shimmered from the asphalt. The whirring inside his head was gone now. It had quieted down, for he had heard nothing about Joe.

He thought of the usual dialogue. He'd sit there with a malt and lean over. "Miss Willow, I love you. Will you marry me?"

Something was empty inside him. He turned the corner and was confronted by the tandem bike on the drug store ad again. He saw Susie through the window.

At least her husband can't object, he thought.

He had a sudden feeling of being hunted as he sat down at the counter. Out of the corner of his eye he watched Susie approach.

"Well, Wally, where have you been all this time? My goodness, first Joe runs off and then you," she twittered, automatically snatching a coke glass from the shelf.

Wallace looked up. "Joe —"

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"My stars, he'd been wandering all over town and nearly had a stroke it was so hot (you know how stout people suffer from the heat) but when the shower came up he felt better. He's out in back burning some rubbish right now."

Wallace grinned. A great cool wind went through him, and at that moment it was as if all the burdens of the world had been lifted from his back. He drained the coke Susie passed him at a single gulp. "Gee whiz! Glad to hear the old boy's all right . . . I guess," he said, a little disappointed.

"Gee whiz, Susie —" He started to say something to her, something about love and will you marry me, but he realized then he would probably never be able to say the words so they'd be funny anymore. "Gee whiz," he repeated, and wandered out of the drug store. His feet moved him back along the street, and he seemed in a daze. To think he had actually believed that voodoo stuff had been on the level!

He had made up his mind. He'd go back to his room first thing and burn that silly book, and then go out and pin down a job. He'd show Granislauer anyhow.

With brightened spirits he started up the back stairs to his apartment. It was then that he remembered.

The Christmas tree! Why had no one seen it? And Joe's poking himself in the eye! Had they been coincidences? But if voodoo had worked those times, why hadn't it worked . . . on Joe?

Wally knew what the reason might be. Once, when he was in high school, he was supposed to do an experiment in chemistry class. The entire second floor was gassed out for a week. He was always slipping up, and perhaps he was little more successful in black magic!

Confused, he hesitated at the top step, trying to remember what he might have done that was wrong or right when Joe poked his eye or when the tree became invisible to the August People or when Joe stumbled out of the drug store toward the river. As he paused something else came to him. There were other experiments that might accidentally turn up more — coincidences . . .

As he came down the hall, he became aware of a strange, thick odor, and wondered what the landlady had done to the dinner. He reached for the doorknob, and heard a sudden creaking of bedsprings in his room. The landlady must be in there cleaning up, he thought. Surely I wouldn't be having company this time of the day. He opened the door.

He was wrong.

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A mad scientist fanatically devoted to the breeding of giant ants would normally stand little chance of turning up in this magazine; but since the sinister Dr. Sardon's life intersected that of the Saint, we cannot resist recording his experiments here. "In the course," Leslie Charteris once wrote, "of a frightening number of Saint stories, I have tried to project him into as many established story styles as possible. This is my one attempt to put the Saint into a pure horror story" — and we may add our hopes that the attempt will some day be repeated. Note: For one brief and wondrous period, Mr. Charteris was a publisher, and able to print his own works as he wanted them, unhampered by a publisher's copy-reader. This story is reprinted from the official Charteris text, complete with antiquated British spellings, modern American word-forms, and occasional punctuation out of the future . . . all perhaps symbolic of the attractive timelessness of both the Saint and his creator.

The Man Who Liked Ants

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

"I WONDER what would have happened if you had gone into a respectable business, Saint," Ivar Nordsten remarked one afternoon.

Simon Templar smiled at him so innocently that for an instant his nickname might almost have seemed justified — if it had not been for the faint lazy twinkle of unsaintly mockery that stirred at the back of his blue eyes. "The question is too farfetched, Ivar. You might as well speculate about what would have happened if I'd been a Martian or a horse."

They sat on the veranda of the house of Ivar Nordsten — whose name was not really Ivar Nordsten, but who was alive that day and the master of fabulous millions only because the course of one of the Saint's lawless escapades had once crossed his path at a time when death would have seemed a happy release. He of all living men should have had no wish to change the history of that twentieth-century Robin Hood, whose dark reckless face and gay impudence of outlawry had in its time set the underworlds of five continents buzzing like nests of infuriated wasps. But in that mood of idle fantasy which may well come with the after-lunch contentment of a

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warm Florida afternoon, Nordsten would have put forward almost any preposterous premise that might give him the pleasure of listening to his friend. "It isn't as farfetched as that," he said. "You will never admit it, but you have many respectable instincts."

"But I have so many more disreputable ones to keep them under control," answered the Saint earnestly. "And it's always been so much more amusing to indulge the disreputable instincts. . . . No, Ivar, I mustn't let you make a paragon out of me. If I were quite cynically psychoanalyzing myself, I should probably say that the reason why I only soak the more obvious excrescences on the human race is because it makes everything okay with my respectable instincts and lets them go peacefully to sleep. Then I can turn all my disreputable impulses loose on the mechanical problem of soaking this obvious excrescence in some satisfyingly novel and juicy manner, and get all the fun of original sin out of it without any qualms of conscience."

"But you contradict yourself. The mere fact that you speak in terms of what you call 'an obvious excrescence on the human race' proves that you have some moral standards by which you judge him, and that you have some idealistic interest in the human race itself."

"The human race," said the Saint sombrely, "is a repulsive, dull, bloated, ill-conditioned and ill-favoured mass of dimly conscious meat, the chief justification for whose existence is that it provides a contrasting background against which my beauty and spiritual perfections can shine with a lustre only exceeded by your own."

"You have a natural modesty which I had never suspected," Nordsten observed gravely, and they both laughed. "But," he added, "I think you will get on well with Dr Sardon."

"Who is he?"

"A neighbour of mine. We are dining with him tonight."

Simon frowned. "I warned you that I was travelling without any dress clothes," he began, but Nordsten shook his head maliciously.

"Dr Sardon likes dress clothes even less than you do. And you never warned me that you were coming here at all. So what could I do? I accepted his invitation a week ago, so when you arrived I could only tell Sardon what had happened. Of course he insisted that you must come with me. But I think he will interest you."

The Saint sighed resignedly and swished the highball gently around in his glass so that the ice clinked. "Why should I be interested in any of your neighbours?" he protested. "I didn't come here to commit any crimes; and I'm sure all these people are as respectable as millionaires can be."

"Dr Sardon is not a millionaire. He is a very brilliant biologist."

"What else makes him interesting?"

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"He is very fond of ants," said Nordsten seriously, and the Saint sat up.

Then he finished his drink deliberately and put down the glass. "Now I know that this climate doesn't agree with you," he said. "Let's get changed and go down to the tennis court. I'll put you in your place before we start the evening."

Nevertheless he drove over to Dr Sardon's house that evening in a mood of open-minded curiosity. Scientists he had known before, men who went down thousands of feet into the sea to look at globigerina ooze and men who devised complicated electrical gadgets in laboratories to manufacture gold; but this was the first time that he had heard of a biologist who was fond of ants. Everything that was out of the ordinary was prospective material for the Saint. It must be admitted that in simplifying his own career of elementary equations by which obvious excrescences on the human race could be soaked, he did himself less than justice.

But there was nothing about the square smooth-shaven man who was introduced to him as Dr Sardon to take away the breath of any hardened outlaw. He might perhaps have been an ordinary efficient doctor, possibly with an exclusive and sophisticated practice; more probably he could have been a successful stockbroker, or the manager of any profitable commercial business. He shook hands with them briskly and almost mechanically, seeming to summarize the Saint in one sweeping glance through his crisp-looking rimless pince-nez. "No, you're not a bit late, Mr Nordsten. As a matter of fact I was working until twenty minutes ago. If you had come earlier I should have been quite embarrassed."

He introduced his niece, a dark slender girl with a quiet and rather aloof beauty which would have been chilling if it had not been relieved by the friendly humour of her brown eyes. About her, Simon admitted, there might certainly have been things to attract the attention of a modern buccaneer. "Carmen has been assisting me. She has a very good degree from Columbia."

He made no other unprompted reference to his researches, and Simon recognized him as the modern type of scientist whose carefully cultivated pose of matter-of-fact worldliness is just as fashionable an affectation as the mystical and bearded eccentricity of his predecessors used to be. Dr Sardon talked about politics, about his golf handicap and about the art of Otto Soglow. He was an entertaining and effective conversationalist but he might never have heard of such a thing as biology until towards the close of dinner Ivar Nordsten skilfully turned a discussion of gardening to the subject of insect pests. "Although, of course," he said, "you would not call them that."

It was strange to see the dark glow that came into Sardon's eyes. "As a

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popular term," he said in his deep vibrant voice, "I suppose it is too well established for me to change it. But it would be much more reasonable for the insects to talk about human pests."

He turned to Simon. "I expect Mr Nordsten has already warned you about the — bee in my bonnet," he said; but he used the phrase without smiling. "Do you by any chance know anything about the subject?"

"I had a flea once," said the Saint reminiscently. "I called him Goebbels. But he left me."

"Then you would be surprised to know how many of the most sensational achievements of man were surpassed by the insects hundreds of years ago without any artificial aids." The finger-tips of his strong nervous hands played a tattoo against each other. "You talk about the Age of Speed and Man's Conquest of the Air; and yet the fly *Cephenomia*, the swiftest living creature, can outpace the fastest of your boasted airplanes. What is the greatest scientific marvel of the century? Probably you would say radio. But Count Arco, the German radio expert, has proved the existence of a kind of wireless telegraphy, or telepathy, between certain species of beetle, which makes nothing of a separation of miles. Lakhovsky claims to have demonstrated that this is common to several other insects. When the *Redemanni* termites build their twenty-five-foot conical towers topped with ten-foot chimneys they are performing much greater marvels of engineering than building an Empire State Building. To match them, in proportion to our size, we should have to put up skyscrapers four thousand feet high — and do it without tools."

"I knew the ants would come into it," said Nordsten sotto voce.

Sardon turned on him with his hot piercing gaze. "Termites are not true ants — the term 'white ants' is a misnomer. Actually they are related to the cockroach. I merely mentioned them as one of the most remarkable of the lower insects. They have a superb social organization, and they may even be superior strategists to the true ants, but they were never destined to conquer the globe. The reason is that they cannot stand light and they cannot tolerate temperatures below twenty degrees centigrade. Therefore, their fields of expansion are forever limited. They are one of Nature's false beginnings. They are a much older species than man, and they have evolved as far as they are likely to evolve. . . . It is not the same with the true ants."

He leaned forward over the table, with his face white and transfigured as if in a kind of trance. "The true ant is the destined ruler of the earth. Can you imagine a state of society in which there was no idleness, no poverty, no unemployment, no unrest? We humans would say that it was an unattainable Utopia; and yet it was in existence among the ants when man

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was a hairy savage scarcely distinguishable from an ape. You may say that it is incompatible with progress — that it could only be achieved in the same way that it is achieved by domestic cattle. But the ant has the same instincts which have made man the tyrant of creation in his time. *Lasius fuliginosus* keeps and milks its own domestic cattle, in the form of plant lice. *Polyergus rufescens* and *Formica sanguinea* capture slaves and put them to work. *Messor barbarus*, the harvesting ant, collects and stores grain. The *Attini* cultivate mushrooms in underground forcing houses. And all these things are done, not for private gain, but for the good of the whole community. Could man in any of his advances ever boast of that?"

"But if ants have so many advantages," said the Saint slowly, "and they've been civilized so much longer than man, why haven't they conquered the earth before this?"

"Because Nature cheated them. Having given them so much, she made them wait for the last essential — pure physical bulk."

"The brontosaurus had enough of that," said Nordsten, "and yet man took its place."

Sardon's thin lips curled. "The difference in size between man and brontosaurus was nothing compared with the difference in size between man and ant. There are limits to the superiority of brain over brawn — even to the superiority of the brain of an ant, which in proportion to its size is twice as large as the brain of a man. But the time is coming . . ." His voice sank almost to a whisper, and in the dim light of candles on the table the smouldering luminousness of his eyes seemed to leave the rest of his face in deep shadow. "With the ant, Nature overreached herself. The ant was ready to take his place at the head of creation before creation was ready for him — before the solar system had progressed far enough to give him the conditions in which his body, and his brain with it, his brain which in all its intrinsic qualities is so much finer than the brain of man, could grow to the brute size at which all its potentialities could be developed. Nevertheless, when the solar system is older, and the sun is red because the white heat of its fire is exhausted, and the red light which will accelerate the growth of all living cells is stronger, the ant will be waiting for his turn. Unless Nature finds a swifter instrument than Time to put right her miscalculation . . ."

"Does it matter?" asked the Saint lightly, and Sardon's face seemed to flame at him.

"It matters. That is only another thing which we can learn from the ant — that individual profit and ambition should count for nothing beside more enduring good. Listen. When I was a boy I loved small creatures. Among them I kept a colony of ants. In a glass box. I watched them in their busy lives, I studied them as they built their nest, I saw how they divided their

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labor and how they lived and died so that their common life could go on. I loved them because they were so much better than everyone else I knew. But the other boys could not understand. They thought I was soft and stupid. They were always tormenting me. One day they found my glass box where the ants lived. I fought them, but there were so many of them. They were big and cruel. They made a fire and they put my box on it, while they held me. I saw the ants running, fighting, struggling insanely ——" The hushed voice tightened as he spoke until it became thin and shrill like a suppressed scream. "I saw them curling up and shriveling, writhing, tortured. I could hear the hiss of their seething agony in the flames. I saw them going mad, twisting — sprawling — blackening — *burning alive before my eyes* ——"

"Uncle!"

The quiet voice of the girl Carmen cut softly across the muted shriek in which the last words were spoken, so quietly and normally that it was only in the contrast that Simon realized that Sardon had not really raised his voice.

The wild fire died slowly out of Sardon's eyes. For a moment his face remained set and frozen, and then, as if he had only been recalled from a fleeting lapse of attention, he seemed to come awake again with a slight start. "Where was I?" he said calmly. "Oh yes. I was speaking about the intelligence of ants. . . . It is even a mistake to assume, because they make no audible sounds, that they have not just as excellent means of communication as ourselves. Whether they share the telepathic gifts of other insects is a disputed point, but it is certain that in their antennae they possess an idiom which is adequate to all ordinary needs. By close study and observation it has even been possible for us to learn some of the elementary gestures. The work of Karl Escherich . . ."

He went into details, in the same detached incisive tone in which he had been speaking before his outburst.

Simon Templar's fingers stroked over the cloth, found a crumb of bread and massaged it gradually into a soft round pellet. He stole a casual glance at the girl. Her aloof oval face was pale, but that might have been its natural complexion; her composure was unaltered. Sardon's outburst might never have occurred, and she might never have had to interrupt it. Only the Saint thought that he saw a shadow of fear moving far down in her eyes.

Even after Carmen had left the table, and the room was richening with the comfortable aromas of coffee and liqueur brandy and cigars, Sardon was still riding his hobbyhorse. It went on for nearly an hour, until at one of the rare lulls in the discussion Nordsten said: "All the same, Doctor, you are very mysterious about what this has to do with your own experiments."

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Sardon's hands rested on the table, white and motionless, the fingers spread out. "Because I was not ready. Even to my friends I should not like to show anything incomplete. But in the last few weeks I have disposed of my uncertainty. Tonight, if you like, I could show you a little."

"We should be honoured."

The flat pressure of Sardon's hands on the table increased as he pushed back his chair and stood up. "My workshops are at the end of the garden," he said, and blew out the four candles.

As they rose and followed him from the room, Nordsten touched the Saint's arm and said in a low voice: "Are you sorry I dragged you out?"

The girl Carmen rejoined them as they left the house. Simon found her walking beside him as they strolled through the warm moonlight. He dropped the remains of his cigar and offered his cigarette case; they stopped for a moment while he gave her a light. Neither of them spoke, but her arm slipped through his as they went on.

The blaze of lights which Sardon switched on in his laboratory wiped the dim silvery gloom out of their eyes in a crash of harsh glaring illumination. In contrast with the tasteful furnishings of the house, the cold white walls and bare tiled floor struck the Saint's sensitive vision with the hygienic and inhuman chill which such places always gave him. But Sardon's laboratory was not like any other place of that kind in which he had ever been.

Ranged along the walls were rows of big glass-fronted boxes, in which apparently formless heaps of litter and rubble could be dimly made out. His eye was caught by a movement in one of the boxes, and he stepped up to look at it more closely. Almost in the same moment he stopped, and nearly recoiled from it, as he realized that he was looking at the largest ant that he had ever seen. It was fully six inches long; and, magnified in that proportion, he could see every joint in its shiny armor-plated surface and the curious bifurcated claws at the ends of its legs. It stood there with its antennae waving gently, watching him with its bulging eyes . . . "*Tetramorium cespitum*," said Dr Sardon, standing beside him. "One of my early experiments. Its natural size is about three tenths of an inch, but it did not respond very well to treatment."

"I should say it had responded heroically," said the Saint. "You don't mean you can do better than that?"

Sardon smiled. "It was one of my early experiments," he repeated. "I was then merely trying to improve on the work of Ludwig and Ries of Berne, who were breeding giant insects almost comparable with that one, many years ago, with the aid of red light. Subsequently I discovered another principle of growth which they had overlooked, and I also found that an artificial selective cross-breeding between different species not only im-

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proved the potential size but also increased the intelligence. For instance, here is one of my later results — a combination of *Oecophylla smaragdina* and *Prenolepsis imparis*."

He went to one of the longer and larger boxes at the end of the room. At first Simon could see nothing but a great mound of twigs and leaves piled high in one corner. There were two or three bones, stripped bare and white, lying on the sandy floor of the box. . . . Then Sardon tapped on the glass, and Simon saw with a sudden thrill of horror that what had been a dark hole in the mound of leaves was no longer black and empty. There was a head peering out of the shadow — dark bronze-green, iridescent, covered with short sparse bristly hairs. . . . "*Oecophylla* is, of course, one of the more advanced species," Sardon was saying, in his calm precise manner. "It is the only known creature other than man to use a tool. The larvae secrete a substance similar to silk, with which the *ants* weave leaves together to make their nests, holding the larvae in their jaws and using them as shuttles. I don't yet know whether my hybrid has inherited that instinct."

"It looks as if it would make a charming pet, anyway," murmured the Saint thoughtfully. "Sort of improved lap dog, isn't it?"

The faint sly smile stayed fixed on Sardon's thin lips. He took two steps further, to a wide sliding door that took up most of the wall at the end of the laboratory, and looked back at them sidelong. "Perhaps you would like to see the future ruler of the world," he said, so very softly that it seemed as if everyone else stopped breathing while he spoke.

Simon heard the girl beside him catch her breath, and Nordsten said quickly: "Surely we've troubled you enough already ——"

"I should like to see it," said the Saint quietly.

Sardon's tongue slid once over his lips. He put his hand up and moved a couple of levers on the glittering panels of dials and switches beside the door. It was to the Saint that his gaze returned, with that rapt expression of strangely cunning and yet childish happiness.

"You will see it from where you stand. I will ask you to keep perfectly still, so as not to draw attention to yourselves — there is a strain of *Dorylina* in this one. *Dorylina* is one of the most intelligent and highly disciplined species, but it is also the most savage. I do not wish it to become angry ——" His arm stretched out to the handle of the door. He slid it aside in one movement, standing with his back to it, facing them.

The girl's cold hand touched the Saint's wrist. Her fingers slipped down over his hand and locked in with his own, clutching them in a sudden convulsive grip. He heard Ivar Nordsten's suppressed gasp as it caught in his throat, and an icy tingle ran up his spine and broke out in a clammy dew on his forehead.

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The rich red light from the chamber beyond the door spilled out like liquid fire, so fierce and vivid that it seemed as if it could only be accompanied by the scorching heat of an open furnace; but it held only a slight appreciable warmth. It beat down from huge crimson arcs ranged along the cornices of the inner room among a maze of shining tubes and twisted wires; there was a great glass hall opposite in which a pale yellow streak of lightning forked and flickered with a faint humming sound. The light struck scarlet highlights from the gleaming bars of a great metal cage like a gigantic chicken coop which filled the centre of the room to within a yard of the walls. And within the cage something monstrous and incredible stood motionless, staring at them. Simon would see it sometimes, years afterwards, in uneasy dreams. Something immense and frightful, glistening like burnished copper, balanced on angled legs like bars of plated metal. Only for a few seconds he saw it then, and for most of that time he was held fascinated by its eyes, understanding something that he would never have believed before. . . .

And then suddenly the thing moved, swiftly and horribly and without sound; and Sardon slammed the door shut, blotting out the eye-aching sea of red light and leaving only the austere cold whiteness of the laboratory. "They are not all like lap dogs," Sardon said in a kind of whisper.

Simon took out a handkerchief and passed it across his brow. The last thing about that weird scene that fixed itself consciously in his memory was the girl's fingers relaxing their tense grip on his hand, and Sardon's eyes, bland and efficient and businesslike again, pinned steadily on them both in a sort of secret sneer. . . .

"What do you think of our friend?" Ivar Nordsten asked, as they drove home two hours later.

Simon stretched out a long arm for the lighter at the side of the car. "He is a lunatic — but of course you knew that. I'm only wondering whether he is quite harmless."

"You ought to sympathize with his contempt for the human race."

The red glow of the Saint's cigarette end brightened so that for an instant the interior of the car was filled with something like a pale reflection of the unearthly crimson luminescence they had seen in Dr Sardon's forcing room. "Did you sympathize with his affection for his pets?"

"Those great ants?" Nordsten shivered involuntarily. "No. That last one — it was the most frightful thing I have ever seen. I suppose it was really alive?"

"It was alive," said the Saint steadily. "That's why I'm wondering whether Dr Sardon is harmless. I don't know what you were looking at, Ivar, but I'll tell you what made my blood run cold. It wasn't the mere

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size of the thing — though any common or garden ant would be terrifying enough if you enlarged it to those dimensions. It was worse than that. It was the proof that Sardon was right. That ant was looking at me. Not like any other insect or even animal that I've ever seen, but like an insect with a man's brain might look. That was the most frightful thing to me. *It knew!*"

Nordsten stared at him. "You mean that you believe what he was saying about it being the future ruler of the world?"

"By itself, no," answered Simon. "But if it were not by itself——"

He did not finish the sentence; and they were silent for the rest of the drive. Before they went to bed he asked one more question. "Who else knows about these experiments?"

"No one, I believe. He told me the other day that he was not prepared to say anything about them until he could show complete success. As a matter of fact, I lent him some money to go on with his work, and that is the only reason he took me into his confidence. I was surprised when he showed us his laboratory tonight — even I had never seen it before."

"So he is convinced now that he can show a complete success," said the Saint quietly, and was still subdued and preoccupied the next morning. In the afternoon he refused to swim or play tennis. He sat hunched up in a chair on the veranda, scowling into space and smoking unnumerable cigarettes, except when he rose to pace restlessly up and down like a big nervous cat.

"What you are really worried about is the girl," Nordsten teased him.

"She's pretty enough to worry about," said the Saint shamelessly. "I think I'll go over and ask her for a cocktail."

Nordsten smiled. "If it will make you a human being again, by all means do," he said. "If you don't come back to dinner I shall know that she is appreciating your anxiety. In any case, I shall probably be very late myself. I have to attend a committee meeting at the golf club and that always adjourns to the bar and goes on for hours."

But the brief tropical twilight had already given way to the dark before Simon made good his threat. He took out Ivar Nordsten's spare Rolls-Royce and drove slowly over the highway until he found the turning that led through the deep cypress groves to the doctor's house. He was prepared to feel foolish; and yet as his headlights circled through the iron gates he touched his hip pocket to reassure himself that if the need arose he might still feel wise. The trees arching over the drive formed a ghostly tunnel down which the Rolls chased its own forerush of light. The smooth hiss of the engine accentuated rather than broke the silence, so that the mind even of a hardened and unimaginative man might cling to the comfort of that faint sound in the same way that the mind of a child might cling to the

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light of a candle as a comfort against the gathering terrors of the night. The Saint's lip curled cynically at the flight of his own thoughts. . . .

And then, as the car turned a bend in the drive, he saw the girl, and trod fiercely on the brakes. The tires shrieked on the macadam and the engine stalled as the big car rocked to a standstill. It flashed through the Saint's mind at that instant, when all sound was abruptly wiped out, that the stillness which he had imagined before was too complete for accident. He felt the skin creep over his back, and had to call on an effort of will to force himself to open the door and get out of the car.

She lay face downwards, halfway across the drive, in the pool of illumination shed by the glaring headlights. Simon turned her over and raised her head on his arm. Her eyelids twitched as he did so; a kind of moan broke from her lips, and she fought away from him, in a dreadful wildness of panic, for the brief moment before her eyes opened and she recognized him.

"My dear," he said, "what has been happening?"

She had gone limp in his arms, the breath jerking pitifully through her lips, but she had not fainted again. And behind him in that surround of stifling stillness, he heard quite clearly the rustle of something brushing stealthily over the grass beside the drive. He saw her eyes turning over his shoulder, saw the wide horror in them. "*Look!*"

He spun around, whipping the gun from his pocket, and for more than a second he was paralyzed. For that eternity he saw the thing, deep in the far shadows, dimly illumined by the marginal reflections from the beam of the headlights — something gross and swollen, a dirty grey-white, shaped rather like a great bleached sausage, hideously bloated. Then the darkness swallowed it again, even as his last shot smashed the silence into a hundred tiny echoes.

The girl was struggling to her feet. He snatched at her wrist. "This way."

He got her into the car and slammed the door. Steel and glass closed around them to give an absurd relief, the weak unreasoning comfort to the naked flesh which men under a bombardment find in cowering behind canvas screens. She slumped against his shoulder, sobbing hysterically. "Oh, my God. My God!"

"What was it?" he asked.

"It's escaped again. I knew it would. He can't handle it ——"

"Has it got loose before?"

"Yes. Once."

He tapped a cigarette on his thumbnail, stroked his lighter. His face was a beaten mask of bronze and granite in the red glow as he drew the smoke down into the mainsprings of his leaping nerves. "I never dreamed it had come to that," he said. "Even last night, I wouldn't have believed it."

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"He wouldn't have shown you that. Even when he was boasting, he wouldn't have shown you. That was his secret. . . . And I've helped him. Oh God," she said. "I can't go on!"

He gripped her shoulders. "Carmen," he said quietly. "You must go away from here."

"He'd kill me."

"You must go away."

The headlamps threw back enough light for him to see her face, tear-streaked and desperate. "He's mad," she said. "He must be. Those horrible things . . . I'm afraid. I wanted to go away but he wouldn't let me. I can't go on. Something terrible is going to happen. One day I saw it catch a dog . . . Oh, my God, if you hadn't come when you did ——"

"Carmen." He still held her, speaking slowly and deliberately, putting every gift of sanity that he possessed into the level dominance of his voice. "You must not talk like this. You're safe now. Take hold of yourself."

She nodded. "I know. I'm sorry. I'll be all right. But ——"

"Can you drive?"

"Yes."

He started the engine and turned the car around. Then he pushed the gear lever into neutral and set the hand brake. "Drive this car," he said. "Take it down to the gates and wait for me there. You'll be close to the highway, and there'll be plenty of other cars passing for company. Even if you do see anything, you needn't be frightened. Treat the car like a tank and run it over. Ivar won't mind — he's got plenty more. And if you hear anything, don't worry. Give me half an hour, and if I'm not back go to Ivar's and talk to him."

Her mouth opened incredulously. "You're not getting out again?"

"I am. And I'm scared stiff." The ghost of a smile touched his lips, and then she saw that his face was stern and cold. "But I must talk to your uncle."

He gripped her arm for a moment, kissed her lightly, and got out. Without a backward glance he walked quickly away from the car, up the drive towards the house. A flashlight in his left hand lanced the darkness ahead of him with its powerful beam, and he swung it from left to right as he walked, holding his gun in his right hand. His ears strained into the gloom which his eyes could not penetrate, probing the silence under the soft scuff of his own footsteps for any sound that would give him warning; but he forced himself not to look back. The palms of his hands were moist.

The house loomed up in front of him. He turned off to one side of the building, following the direction in which he remembered that Dr Sardon's laboratory lay. Almost at once he saw the squares of lighted windows

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through the trees. A dull clang of sound came to him, followed by a sort of furious thumping. He checked himself; and then as he walked on more quickly some of the lighted windows went black. The door of the laboratory opened as the last light went out, and his torch framed Dr Sardon and the doorway in its yellow circle.

Sardon was pale and dishevelled, his clothes awry. One of his sleeves was torn, and there was a scratch on his face from which blood ran. He flinched from the light as if it had burned him. "Who is that?" he shouted.

"This is Simon Templar," said the Saint in a commonplace tone. "I just dropped in to say hullo."

Sardon turned the switch down again and went back into the laboratory. The Saint followed him. "You just dropped in, eh? Of course. Good. Why not? Did you run into Carmen, by any chance?"

"I nearly ran over her," said the Saint evenly.

The doctor's wandering glance snapped to his face. Sardon's hands were shaking, and a tiny muscle at the side of his mouth twiched spasmodically. "Of course," he said vacantly. "Is she all right?"

"She is quite safe." Simon had put away his gun before the other saw it. He laid a hand gently on the other's shoulder. "You've had trouble here," he said.

"She lost her nerve," Sardon retorted furiously. "She ran away. It was the worst thing she could do. They understand, these creatures. They are too much for me to control now. They disobey me. My commands must seem so stupid to their wonderful brains. If it had not been that this one is heavy and waiting for her time ——" He checked himself.

"I knew," said the Saint calmly.

The doctor peered up at him out of the corners of his eyes.

"You knew?" he repeated cunningly.

"Yes. I saw it."

"Just now?"

Simon nodded. "You didn't tell us last night," he said. "But it's what I was afraid of. I have been thinking about it all day."

"You've been thinking, have you? That's funny." Sardon chuckled shrilly. "Well, you're quite right. I've done it. I've succeeded. I don't have to work any more. They can look after themselves now. That's funny, isn't it?"

"So it is true. I hoped I was wrong."

Sardon edged closer to him. "You hoped you were wrong? You fool! But I would expect it of you. You are the egotistical human being who believes in his ridiculous conceit that the whole history of the world from its own birth, all the species and races that have come into being and been discarded,

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everything — everything has existed only to lead up to his own magnificent presence on the earth. Bah! Do you imagine that your miserable little life can stand in the way of the march of evolution? Your day is over! Finished! In there" — his arms stiffened and pointed — "in there you can find the matriarch of the new ruling race of the earth. At any moment she will begin to lay her eggs, thousands upon thousands of them, from which her sons and daughters will breed — as big as she is, with her power and her brains." His voice dropped. "To me it is only wonderful that I should have been Nature's chosen instrument to give them their rightful place a million years before Time would have opened the door to them."

The flame in his eyes sank down as his voice sank and his features seemed to relax so that his square clean-cut efficient face became soft and beguiling like the face of an idiot child. "I know what it feels like to be God."

Simon held both his arms.

"Dr Sardon," he said, "you must not go on with this experiment."

The other's face twisted. "The experiment is finished," he snarled. "Are you still blind? Look — I will show you."

He was broad-shouldered and powerfully built, and his strength was that of a maniac. He threw off the Saint's hands with a convulsive wrench of his body and ran to the sliding door at the end of the room. He turned with his back to it, grasping the handle, as the Saint started after him. "You shall meet them yourself," he said hoarsely. "They are not in their cage any more. I will let them out here, and you shall see whether you can stand against them. Stay where you are!"

A revolver flashed in his hand; and the Saint stopped four paces from him. "For your own sake, Dr Sardon," he said, "stand away from that door."

The doctor leered at him crookedly. "You would like to burn my ants," he whispered.

He turned and fumbled with the spring catch, his revolver swinging carelessly wide from its aim; and the door had started to move when Simon shot him twice through the heart.

Simon was stretched out on the veranda, sipping a highball and sniping mosquitoes with a cigarette end, when Nordsten came up the steps from his car. The Saint looked up with a smile. "My dear fellow," said Nordsten, "I thought you would be at the fire."

"Is there a fire?" Simon asked innocently.

"Didn't you know? Sardon's whole laboratory has gone up in flames. I heard about it at the club, and when I left I drove back that way thinking I should meet you. Sardon and his niece were not there, either. It will be a

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terrible shock for him when he hears of it. The place was absolutely gutted — I've never seen such a blaze. It might have been soaked in gasoline. It was still too hot to go near, but I suppose all his work has been destroyed. Did you miss Carmen?"

The Saint pointed over his shoulder. "At the present moment she's sleeping in your best guest room," he said. "I gave her enough of your sleeping tablets to keep her like that till breakfast time."

Nordsten looked at him. "And where is Sardon?" he asked at length.

"He is in his laboratory."

Nordsten poured himself out a drink and sat down. "Tell me," he said.

Simon told him the story. When he had finished, Nordsten was silent for a while. Then he said: "It's all right, of course. A fire like that must have destroyed all the evidence. It could all have been an accident. But what about the girl?"

"I told her that her uncle had locked the door and refused to let me in. Her evidence will be enough to show that Sardon was not in his right mind."

"Would you have done it anyhow, Simon?"

The Saint nodded. "I think so. That's what I was worried about, ever since last night. It came to me at once that if any of those brutes could breed ——" He shrugged a little wearily. "And when I saw that great queen ant, I knew that it had gone too far. I don't know quite how rapidly ants can breed, but I should imagine that they do it by thousands. If the thousands were all the same size as Sardon's specimens, with the same intelligence, who knows what might have been the end of it?"

"But I thought you disliked the human race," said Nordsten.

Simon got up and strolled across the veranda. "Taken in the mass," he said soberly, "it will probably go on nauseating me. But it isn't my job to alter it. If Sardon was right, Nature will find her own remedy. But the world has millions of years left, and I think evolution can afford to wait."

His cigarette spun over the rail and vanished into the dark like a firefly as the butler came out to announce dinner; and they went into the dining room together.

It was long Mr. Charteris' custom to conclude each Saint story with Simon Templar's stick-figure signature and the words: WATCH FOR THE SIGN OF THE SAINT: HE WILL BE BACK. *We've now brought you the only two science-fantasy short stories in which the Saint appears; but we're sure that a life so varied as his cannot long avoid some repetition of the, by normal standards, impossible. So join with us in our hopes and our entreaties to Mr. Charteris: if all goes well,* HE WILL BE BACK.

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There has been a great deal of to-do in modern science fiction about the dangers of Aristotelian, black-and-white, either-or logic, and many vasty battling-towers (themselves occasionally a trifle shaky) have been erected to demolish its bastions. Now Ralph Robin tells a simple, direct little story, with no implementation from Null-A Korzybskianism, which settles the question of the power of man's will when confronted with a sharp either-or alternative.

Mr. Prime

by RALPH ROBIN

"I WANT you to work for me," said the colonel, Roy's commanding officer. He was really a business man now and Roy was a bookkeeper. In his lordly way the colonel gestured to the waiter for another round of the twenty-year-old scotch. "You are smart," he flattered. "And you have a flexible mind." He meant Roy had no conscience.

But the colonel was wrong. Roy had a conscience. Leona was his conscience. "Don't go," she told him, "no matter how much he offers. You have a steady position with a good company. We can get along. Why, I wouldn't marry you if you went to work for that unethical man."

Roy wanted to marry Leona. He also wanted to make money. In three days he had not made up his mind, and he was still indecisive while he sat on a bench in a grassy square in the brick-and-concrete city.

Nodding courteously, an old man sat down beside Roy; inevitably he moved the king's pawn of conversation, the weather. He was one of those immaculate ancients you meet in parks: white stiff collar with comfortable clearance for the scrupulously shaved throat; string tie; dark suit; and glistening black elkskin shoes. Roy agreed that the day was hot.

They sat quietly for a few moments, while he stared at Roy with the lack of self-consciousness shown by the very young and the very old; he seemed to be considering whether it was worthwhile to speak. At last he nodded slightly and advanced the bishop across the board.

"I will tell you a story," the old man said, and this is the story he told.

In another city many years ago I used to walk in a wooded park not far from Mrs. Gempel's house, where I was boarding. I liked especially the

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evenings of spring when the combination of twilight, loneliness, and green growth provided a background for my brooding and for my daydreams.

I was not happy. It seemed a poor kind of living to be twenty-two and to be imprisoned in a drafting room six days a week under the cantankerous thumbs of the brothers Hoober. I was a very junior employe indeed, compelled to spend ten hours a day inking in the drawings of my seniors. My only hope for the future was a night course I was taking at the university, which eventually would make me a full-fledged civil engineer. But the program was nine years long, and I found it hard to bear that I would be 30 before I really started in life.

If it had not been for Dorothy Winters probably I would have thrown an inkwell at Ezekiah Hoober, burned my night-school lecture notes, and left town in a boxcar. I remember to this day her beautiful blue eyes, or perhaps they were brown. At any rate I was very much in love, and it broke my heart that I could not marry her forthwith. Mr. and Mrs. Winters disapproved of me because of my poor prospects and also because I was reported (accurately enough) to have come out of a saloon one night.

Dorothy's parents had never quite forbidden her to see me. They allowed me to visit occasionally but watched us very closely. One wonderful evening in late May I was sitting on the Winters' porch swing and lightly holding my beloved's finger tips. Meanwhile I kept glancing at the parlor curtains which moved suspiciously from time to time.

"Darling," said Dorothy.

"Angel," I said.

"Darling," said Dorothy, "you must leave soon or daddy and mama won't let you come any more."

"Angel," I said, "I love you."

"Darling, I love you too." Dorothy scuffed her foot on the floor and the swing twisted and she said, "Darling, I worry about you. What are you going to do tonight when you leave here?"

"I think I'll go for a little walk. Need the exercise, you know."

Dorothy tenderly squeezed my fingers, and I wriggled with pleasure. After a moment she said, "Darling, do you think walking in the woods by yourself is the best kind of exercise? Why don't you join the YMCA and exercise in the gymnasium? Besides — it is my duty to tell you this, darling, though I don't believe it for one little minute — there has been some talk about a bottle of whisky hidden under a rock."

I said something that took me half an hour to apologize for, and I promised to go straight home and study my calculus, and I left having been allowed to kiss Dorothy's cheek.

When I reached the iron gate of my boardinghouse I saw Mrs. Gempel

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and two of her cronies sitting on the veranda. I reflected that a person's reputation, which was in that city a person's future, could be in their hands. "Norns with knitting needles," I thought resentfully, for I had read a book or two. I was sure that Mrs. Gempel was responsible for the whisky-bottle tale, and I could not bear to go in. I bowed with dignity and said, "Hags," but not aloud, and walked past the gate and down the street.

Mothers were calling to children as my mother had called to me; the paved street could not too quickly escape the houses and narrow to dirt at the threshold of the park. I walked farther, and the dirt road became a footpath along the high bank of Johnson's Creek. I preferred this path to all other trails in the park because it was so seldom used. The creek had been pure and clear until a new community north of the city installed a sewage system that drained into it. Swollen with foul gray liquid, the stream was now no more than an open sewer, which the children of the neighborhood called Stink River. But I was not squeamish, and the occasional whiff from the water below was a small price to pay for having the oaks and buckeye trees to myself in the coolness of dusk.

And so I walked, hearing the last irritable chirps of the birds, the last nervous rustle of a chipmunk, and the gurgle of the water over rocks and roots. I came to a favorite spot. Here a flight of wide flagstone steps led to the edge of Johnson's Creek. They had been built in the creek's better days, and children then must have loved to hop to the bottom step and to dip their hands in the cold water and to watch the minnows flick by.

Somewhere else I had teased the minnows and watched them glisten, and not so many years before. I felt homesickness welling inside me. Then I realized again that childhood was unrecapturable and that a man must go his way.

"So he must. You speak the truth. A man must go his way."

I looked around wildly, for I had not spoken my thoughts. I saw nothing; then I had a feeling that the voice had drifted up the flight of stone steps. I peered through the residual daylight.

On the stone-paved bank of Johnson's Creek a little figure sat. He was naked, and he squatted on his heels like a Hindu ascetic. But he was no Hindu. He was of no race of man ever photographed, calipered, or described by anthropologists. Standing he would have been no taller than four feet. The color of his skin, I saw through the dying twilight, was closer to purple than to any other hue. His nose was shaped like a radish with a dangling root and his ears like lettuce leaves. His mouth was his most human feature, probably because it seemed to sneer: among natural creatures sneering is an attribute of man alone.

I lacked many virtues when I was young and lack many still. Patience

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and constancy of purpose I did not have, if these indeed are virtues. But I was not without courage. I walked down the steps as deliberately as I could manage and stood squarely above the apparition.

"Who are you and what do you want?" I asked.

I fancied that the sneer disappeared from the being's mouth, and when he replied his voice seemed to have a respectful note. I felt quite set up. When you are twenty-two and a nonentity, a little respect from any source warms the heart.

"Sit down beside me, sir," the creature said, "and I shall introduce myself. I am sensitive about my small stature, and you make me nervous towering above me."

I sat, feeling the damp flagstone through my serge trousers, and he talked. Though it was almost dark, I could see my companion clearly; his whole skin became distinctly luminescent as the natural light vanished.

"I am Primordial," he said. "Or perhaps, since it is becoming increasingly fashionable hereabouts to shorten names, you may call me Prime. Not that I am a greenhorn by any means," he added quickly. "As a matter of fact I have been sitting on this spot for 2,528,467,256 years, waiting for you."

"I am honored, Mr. Prime," I said.

"Not at all," he said graciously. "It was a pleasure; though not entirely unmixed, I must admit. The Paleozoic Era was not so bad. The earth changed only gradually and a body could sit and think. But during the Mesozoic Era all hell broke loose, if you will excuse the profane expression. I do not remember precisely what period of the Mesozoic — for the last few million years my memory has not been what it used to be — but it strikes me that it may have been in the late Jurassic that the rock formations around here started heaving and folding in a most annoying manner, and I never knew from one millennium to another what the altitude would be."

"I suppose you found the Glacial Age rather chilly," I ventured as something to say. It proved to be a tactless remark.

"Young man," said Mr. Prime acidly, "if you are in any doubt as to what the temperature was, would you like to visit the early Pleistocene Epoch and try sitting on a glacier?"

It was the time of new moon and the intimate branches of the trees had disappeared into darkness. There was only the glow of Mr. Prime, undisputed between hill and water. Mr. Prime impressed me as a very unusual individual, and I had little doubt that he could arrange the journey.

"Thank you, no," I said.

The filament which dangled from Mr. Prime's nose was twitching violently, and he said, "I should think not. I sat on a glacier for 20,000

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uncomfortable years. It was chilly, as you so safely pointed out, and, worse than that, the glacier moved continually. I had to keep inching in order to stay at my appointed place. A very undignified spectacle I must have been, scrabbling sideways on my heels."

I had the wit to say nothing. The filament of his nose twitched two or three more times, and Mr. Prime composed himself. "Now to business," he said abruptly but not in an unfriendly tone. "According to certain immutable laws of the cosmos which my species is designated to enforce, an occasional human being of the planet Earth is permitted to choose his own destiny between alternatives that are presented to him. You are such a one.

"Above us is the path that brought you here. It has no forks, and beside it the wooded hill rises. Below is the stream that your contemporaries have so foully contaminated. When you leave this park you will either go as you came, or you will continue along the path to the entrance where the bronze general sits his horse.

"Your entire life will be determined by the route you choose.

"If you go the way you came you will live, prosper, and die in this city. Soon the Hoober brothers will promote you from inking to tracing. They will pay you a little more money and even let you attend classes in the daytime. After your graduation they will place you in a fairly responsible position. Then you will make your peace with Dorothy's parents and get married. At the age of 40 you will have a partnership in the firm, three healthy children, and a bottle of whisky rolled in a blueprint. Your children will be successful by the standards of the place and the time, and when you die you will be sincerely mourned and soon forgotten."

An hour before such a future would have been like cherry pie, red and gold, in a dream when you are hungry. Now I did not much relish the taste of it in my mouth, particularly since Mr. Prime seemed to be mocking me.

"What if I choose the other way?" I asked. "What if I never look back but walk through the night to the bronze general on his horse?"

Mr. Prime looked up at me. The purple light of his body flared to a brightness from which I would not turn, and I struggled with my eyes to keep them open. "Go if you dare. Others have dared. Take that path and you will leave engineering and the Hoobers and Dorothy forever on the other side of the park. You will harden your ambition, and your ambition will harden you. Far from here you will become the political leader of a great city. By devious and bloody ways you will seize the Republic for your own. A day will come when you will set out to conquer the world, and you will rise to heights of power such as Napoleon Buonaparte never

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aspired to. When you die none will mourn you with sincerity, but you will never be forgotten so long as human beings breathe the atmosphere of this world."

Anger was growing within me, man's ancient anger against the chain of cause and effect. But with anger, faith was growing: faith that I had the will to snap that chain.

"Choose," said Mr. Prime.

"I have chosen," I said, and I jumped into Johnson's Creek.

The stream was only a couple of feet deep, but I slipped on the slimy bottom and fell forward. The loathsome water filled my mouth and nose. I got to my feet, vomiting uncontrollably, and fell again. When at last I stood on the opposite bank, nauseous and weak and dripping foully, I turned to face Mr. Prime. I could not see him, but I thought I heard a voice cry, "Good luck, man of Earth." Where he had been, there was the darkness of a moonless night.

I stumbled across a rough meadow, tripping again and again and cutting myself on stones, until I found my way out of the park.

Bloody and with wet torn clothes and stinking of sewers and vomit, I met Mrs. Gempel in Mrs. Gempel's reception hall on Mrs. Gempel's carpet. When she shrieked, I told her shortly to be quiet, and I went upstairs and took a bath with cold water and carbolic soap. Mrs. Gempel pounded on the bathroom door and screamed about the police.

She did not call them, though, and she let me stay the night.

Sunlight woke me and I packed my belongings in my one suitcase and went a-wooing. I was amazed that day, as I have often been since, at the beauty of the world when other people are at work. As for the brothers Hoober, they could have been in China for all I cared about their high stools and their drafting boards.

Carrying a florist's box under my arm, I rapped at the Winters' door. Dorothy herself opened the door, and as soon as I saw her I knew that she had heard. I noticed for the first time that her lips were rather thin. She didn't give me a chance to ask her to elope. She ran on and on about taking the pledge, apologizing to Mrs. Gempel, and going to work like a sensible man.

"Good-bye, angel," I said. I never saw her again.

I roamed around the world for a few years working at one job and another. It was fun. I became a reporter so I could get passes to plays and baseball games. I wasn't bad at the work, and I was a reporter in half a dozen cities before they trapped me at an editor's desk. The girl I eventually married was witty and sensitive, and her lips never looked nor felt thin. We had a wonderful time together until she died ten years ago.

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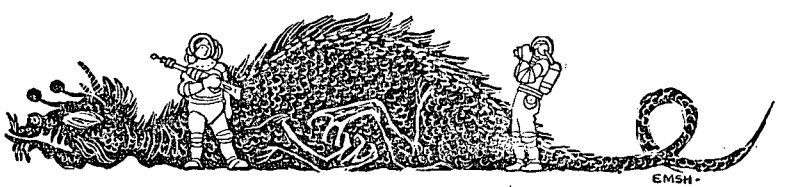
I have done everything I have really wanted to do, and I have seen everything I have really wanted to see.

During the last few weeks I have felt a longing that seems to come from a deep part of my mind. I must go again to a distant city. After sunset and before dark I will walk on a street of that city till I enter a park. Perhaps the footpath has disappeared beneath the roar of a highspeed thoroughfare. Perhaps the buckeye and oak trees have been cut down and the old hill leveled. Probably Johnson's Creek flows underground in a concrete conduit. But I have an idea that when I reach a certain spot a little purple creature will be squatting on his heels.

Softly and more softly the old man had been speaking. His words merged at last with his breathing, and he said no more. He sighed, but not sadly, and rose from the bench.

Roy watched him walk slowly and with unpremeditated dignity across the square. Roy knew then that he did not have to be the colonel's man, holding the colonel's coat through all the intricate operations. He knew too that he did not have to be Leona's man, while she bravely got along on his pay and triumphed in his mediocrity.

Somewhere there must be a third and better fate. He rose and went toward it through the hot still air.



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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

THE fourth volume of Ray Bradbury's short stories, THE GOLDEN APPLES OF THE SUN (Doubleday), provides what can only be described as the most uncertain reading experience of the year to date. Objective analysis (never easy to achieve with Bradbury's work) determines that a very few of these stories are from his own personal top drawer. A small handful just does not merit publication in any form. Stretched out between these two extremes is material of a curiously mixed quality: writing that is often simply and perceptively moving . . . and just as often sadly lacking any particular strength or color.

This department is primarily concerned with only ten of the book's twenty-two stories, eight pieces of science fiction, two of pure fantasy. The best of the science fiction is also a best-of-Bradbury, "The Wilderness," an addendum to THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES that utterly overwhelms any argument that man has reached his last frontier. It is hard to believe that the same writer who created that heartwarming picture of the girls we can never leave behind us, whatever far boundaries we reach, also perpetrated the title story, a really inexcusable effusion of drab writing and scientific nonsense. The two fantasies, "The April Witch" and "Hail and Farewell" are both reassuringly lovely flights of fancy.

The quality of the straight fiction is as bothersomely uneven as that of the science-fantasy. In these, the reader is continually troubled by Bradbury's inability to write about the here and now that, for better or worse, is ours and ours alone. He can write intuitively, if not always surely, about Mexicans and Chinese, but he simply cannot reach out and grasp any part of the ordinary life of an adult, 1953 American.

Six of these stories have never been published before. From the dates of the rest, 1945 to 1953, it seems fair to assume that this book is a general roundup, an effort to get all the work of an author of Bradbury's importance between hard covers. This is a thoroughly acceptable objective. It is equally fair, then, to judge this collection in that light and not take its many disappointments too much to heart. Rather, it should be considered a sort of time out between halves. The first half of Bradbury's career, wherein he undisputedly reached the front rank of contemporary young

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writers, is over; we look forward to his second half, his maturity, with interest and with confidence.

The tone of 1953's novel output is brightened considerably by Clifford D. Simak's headlong melodrama, RING AROUND THE SUN (Simon & Schuster). This amiable gallimaufry of household appliances that never wear out, giant corporations fighting secretly (and ruthlessly) for their very existence, and a hare-and-hounds chase not always confined to this earth isn't on a par with that nonpareil of science fiction novels, the author's own CITY . . . but what could be? It is solid entertainment, though, with plenty of startling plot-twists and some new ammunition for an old argument.

In his FLYING SAUCERS (Harvard University Press) Donald H. Menzel, Professor of Astrophysics at Harvard, has made a gallant effort to dispose of the ubiquitous disks once and for all. His theories of optical refraction assuredly explain some of the Air Force's "unexplained" saucer sightings. And certainly, no previous study of the subject has contained such lengthy documentation of pre-Twentieth Century accounts of mysterious aerial travelers; obviously, Menzel has gone directly to many of Charles Fort's sources and reported them in richer detail than did the old iconoclast. But the book is dreadfully chaotic, full of irrelevant data, cultural uncertainties and semantic unreason. We simply cannot accept his dogmatic, all-embracing thesis that a "real" or "bona-fide" saucer is one that can only be explained by the Menzel method. His final statement "remember that Flying Saucers/1. Do Exist;/2. Have been seen;/3. Are not what people thought they saw" is really devoid of any meaning. We are not convinced because, in Menzel's own words, "We can detect fallacious logic, even when it is disguised with scientific vocabulary."

Equally exasperating, in format and price, if not always in theory, is THE MYSTERY OF OTHER WORLDS REVEALED, edited by Lloyd Mallan (Sterling). This is an assortment of essays, unfocused, unrelated, often mutually contradictory, on space travel, rocket development and the like. There are some very interesting pictures. Published in paper last year, the book was not a bad buy for the specialist; its present cheap binding certainly doesn't merit the price increase to $2.95.

Best bargain in this month's reprints is the paperback edition of A. E. Van Vogt's DESTINATION: UNIVERSE! (Signet). Other reprints come from the bibliographer's arch-enemy, Fantasy Publishing Co., Inc. Sheets of previous books have been bound together and re-titled. QUADRATIC contains Olaf Stapledon's WORLDS OF WONDER and MURDER MADNESS, by Murray Leinster. FANTASY TWIN unites L. Sprague de Camp's THE UNDESIRED PRINCESS with Stanley G. Weinbaum's THE DARK OTHER. Since neither

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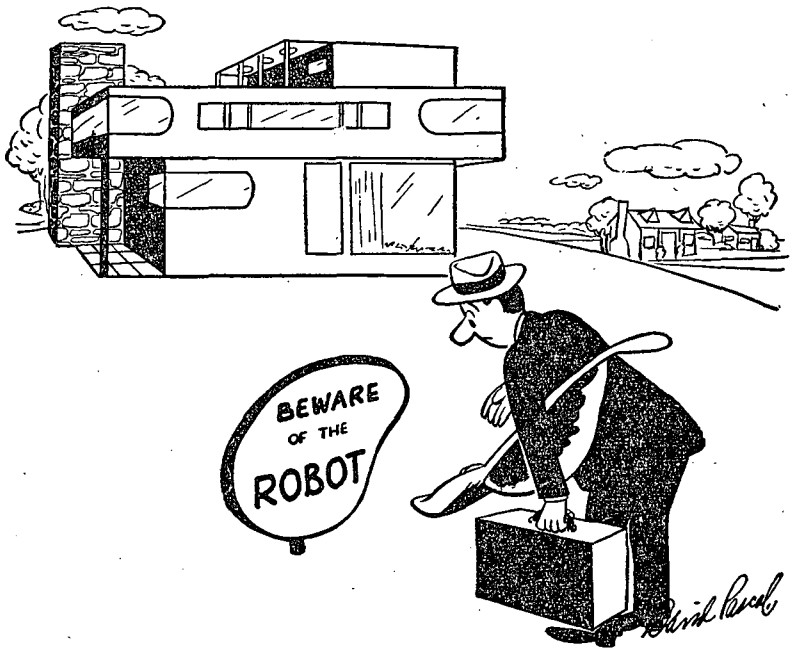
volume has a new title page, or new contents page, or corrected pagination, librarians and collectors will go mad trying to catalog them!

The New English Novelist Series (Roy) starts off as a valuable publishing venture—compact and readable, yet competently scholarly surveys—to familiarize the general reader with interesting, but not too well-known literary figures. Two of its volumes are devoted to early masters of fantasy: Nelson Brown's SHERIDAN LE FANU is a satisfactory account of the first great specialist in the British ghost story, who so strongly affected M. R. James and all who followed; and Robert Ashley's WILKIE COLLINS is a far more than satisfactory analysis of the creator of the English detective novel and author of a few memorable fantasies.



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In November of 1951 Philip Dick sold his first story (to F&SF, we may add proudly), and within a very few months thereafter he had established himself as one of the most prolific new professionals in the field. By now he has appeared in almost every science fiction publication — and what's most surprising, in each case with stories exactly suited to the editorial tastes and needs of that particular publication: the editors of Whizzing Star Patrol *and of the* Quaint Quality Quarterly *are in complete agreement upon Mr. Dick as a singularly satisfactory contributor. Joining with them, we consider this latest Dick precisely* our *kind of story: gently witty, observant and pointed, with a striking new idea attractively blending science and fantasy.*

The Preserving Machine

by PHILIP K. DICK

Doc LABYRINTH leaned back in his lawn chair, closing his eyes gloomily. He pulled his blanket up around his knees.

"Well?" I said. I was standing by the barbecue pit, warming my hands. It was a clear cold day. The sunny Los Angeles sky was almost cloud-free. Beyond Labyrinth's modest house a gently undulating expanse of green stretched off until it reached the mountains — a small forest that gave the illusion of wilderness within the very limits of the city. "Well?" I said. "Then the Machine did work the way you expected?"

Labyrinth did not answer. I turned around. The old man was staring moodily ahead, watching an enormous dun-colored beetle that was slowly climbing the side of his blanket. The beetle rose methodically, its face blank with dignity. It passed over the top and disappeared down the far side. We were alone again.

Labyrinth sighed and looked up at me. "Oh, it worked well enough."

I looked after the beetle, but it was nowhere to be seen. A faint breeze eddied around me, chill and thin in the fading afternoon twilight. I moved nearer the barbecue pit.

"Tell me about it," I said.

Doctor Labyrinth, like most people who read a great deal and who have too much time on their hands, had become convinced that our civilization

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was going the way of Rome. He saw, I think, the same cracks forming that had sundered the ancient world, the world of Greece and Rome; and it was his conviction that presently our world, our society, would pass away as theirs did, and a period of darkness would follow.

Now, Labyrinth, having thought this, began to brood over all the fine and lovely things that would be lost in the reshuffling of societies. He thought of the art, the literature, the manners, the music, everything that would be lost. And it seemed to him that of all these grand and noble things, music would probably be the most lost, the quickest forgotten.

Music is the most perishable of things, fragile and delicate, easily destroyed.

Labyrinth worried about this, because he loved music, because he hated the idea that some day there would be no more Brahms and Mozart, no more gentle chamber music that he could dreamily associate with powdered wigs and resined bows, with long, slender candles, melting away in the gloom.

What a dry and unfortunate world it would be, without music! How dusty and unbearable.

This is how he came to think of the Preserving Machine. One evening as he sat in his living room in his deep chair, the phonograph on low, a vision came to him. He perceived in his mind a strange sight, the last score of a Schubert trio, the last copy, dog-eared, well-thumbed, lying on the floor of some gutted place, probably a museum.

A bomber moved overhead. Bombs fell, bursting the museum to fragments, bringing the walls down in a roar of rubble and plaster. In the debris the last score disappeared, lost in the rubbish, to rot and mold.

And then, in Doc Labyrinth's vision, he saw the score come burrowing out, like some buried mole. Quite like a mole, in fact, with claws and sharp teeth and a furious energy.

If music had that faculty, the ordinary, everyday instinct of survival which every worm and mole has, how different it would be! If music could be transformed into living creatures, animals with claws and teeth, then music might survive. If only a Machine could be built, a Machine to process musical scores into living forms . . .

But Doc Labyrinth was no mechanic. He made a few tentative sketches and sent them hopefully around to the research laboratories. Most of them were much too busy with war contracts, of course. But at last he found the people he wanted. A small mid-western university was delighted with his plans, and they were happy to start work on the Machine at once.

Weeks passed. At last Labyrinth received a post card from the university. The Machine was coming along fine; in fact, it was almost finished. They

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had given it a trial run, feeding a couple of popular songs into it. The results? Two small mouse-like animals had come scampering out, rushing around the laboratory until the cat caught and ate them. But the Machine was a success.

It came to him shortly after, packed carefully in a wood crate, wired together and fully insured. He was quite excited as he set to work, taking the slats from it. Many fleeting notions must have coursed through his mind as he adjusted the controls and made ready for the first transformation. He had selected a priceless score to begin with, the score of the Mozart G Minor Quintet. For a time he turned the pages, lost in thought, his mind far away. At last he carried it to the Machine and dropped it in.

Time passed. Labyrinth stood before it, waiting nervously, apprehensive and not really certain what would greet him when he opened the compartment. He was doing a fine and tragic work, it seemed to him, preserving the music of the great composers for all eternity. What would his thanks be? What would he find? What form would this all take, before it was over?

There were many questions unanswered. The red light of the Machine was glinting, even as he meditated. The process was over, the transformation had already taken place. He opened the door.

"Good Lord!" he said. "This is very odd."

A bird, not an animal, stepped out. The mozart bird was pretty, small and slender, with the flowing plumage of a peacock. It ran a little way across the room and then walked back to him, curious and friendly. Trembling, Doc Labyrinth bent down, his hand out. The mozart bird came near. Then, all at once, it swooped up into the air.

"Amazing," he murmured. He coaxed the bird gently, patiently, and at last it fluttered down to him. Labyrinth stroked it for a long time, thinking. What would the rest of them be like? He could not guess. He carefully gathered up the mozart bird and put it into a box.

He was even more surprised the next day when the beethoven beetle came out, stern and dignified. That was the beetle I saw myself, climbing along his red blanket, intent and withdrawn, on some business of its own.

After that came the schubert animal. The schubert animal was silly, an adolescent sheep-creature that ran this way and that, foolish and wanting to play. Labyrinth sat down right then and there and did some heavy thinking.

Just what *were* survival factors? Was a flowing plume better than claws, better than sharp teeth? Labyrinth was stumped. He had expected an army of stout badger creatures, equipped with claws and scales, digging, fighting, ready to gnaw and kick. Was he getting the right thing? Yet who could say what was good for survival? — the dinosaurs had been well armed, but there were none of them left. In any case the Machine was built; it was too late to turn back, now.

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Labyrinth went ahead, feeding the music of many composers into the Preserving Machine, one after another, until the woods behind his house was filled with creeping, bleating things that screamed and crashed in the night. There were many oddities that came out, creations that startled and astonished him. The brahms insect had many legs sticking in all directions, a vast, platter-shaped centipede. It was low and flat, with a coating of uniform fur. The brahms insect liked to be by itself, and it went off promptly, taking great pains to avoid the wagner animal who had come just before.

The wagner animal was large and splashed with deep colors. It seemed to have quite a temper, and Doc Labyrinth was a little afraid of it, as were the bach bugs, the round ball-like creatures, a whole flock of them, some large, some small, that had been obtained for the Forty-Eight Preludes and Fugues. And there was the stravinsky bird, made up of curious fragments and bits, and many others besides.

So he let them go, off into the woods, and away they went, hopping and rolling and jumping as best they could. But already a sense of failure hung over him. Each time a creature came out he was astonished; he did not seem to have control over the results at all. It was out of his hands, subject to some strong, invisible law that had subtly taken over, and this worried him greatly. The creatures were bending, changing before a deep, impersonal force, a force that Labyrinth could neither see nor understand. And it made him afraid.

Labyrinth stopped talking. I waited for awhile but he did not seem to be going on. I looked around at him. The old man was staring at me in a strange, plaintive way.

"I don't really know much more," he said. "I haven't been back there for a long time, back in the woods. I'm afraid to. I know something is going on, but —"

"Why don't we both go and take a look?"

He smiled with relief. "You wouldn't mind, would you? I was hoping you might suggest that. This business is beginning to get me down." He pushed his blanket aside and stood up, brushing himself off. "Let's go, then."

We walked around the side of the house and along a narrow path, into the woods. Everything was wild and chaotic, overgrown and matted, an unkempt, unattended sea of green. Doc Labyrinth went first, pushing the branches off the path, stooping and wriggling to get through.

"Quite a place," I observed. We made our way for a time. The woods were dark and damp; it was almost sunset, now, and a light mist was descending on us, drifting down through the leaves above.

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"No one comes here." The Doc stopped suddenly, looking around. "Maybe we'd better go and find my gun. I don't want anything to happen."

"You seem certain that things have got out of hand." I came up beside him and we stood together. "Maybe it's not as bad as you think."

Labyrinth looked around. He pushed some shrubbery back with his foot. "They're all around us, everywhere, watching us. Can't you feel it?"

I nodded absently. "What's this?" I lifted up a heavy, moldering branch, particles of fungus breaking from it. I pushed it out of the way. A mound lay outstretched, shapeless and indistinct, half-buried in the soft ground.

"What is it?" I said again. Labyrinth stared down, his face tight and forlorn. He began to kick at the mound aimlessly. I felt uncomfortable. "What is it, for heaven's sake?" I said. "Do you know?"

Labyrinth looked slowly up at me. "It's the schubert animal," he murmured. "Or, it was, once. There isn't much left of it, anymore."

The schubert animal — that was the one that had run and leaped like a puppy, silly and wanting to play. I bent down, staring at the mound, pushing a few leaves and twigs from it. It was dead, all right. Its mouth was open, its body had been ripped wide. Ants and vermin were already working on it, toiling endlessly away. It had begun to stink.

"But what happened?" Labyrinth said. He shook his head. "What could have done it?"

There was a sound. We turned quickly.

For a moment we saw nothing. Then a bush moved, and for the first time we made out its form. It must have been standing there watching us all the time. The creature was immense, thin and extended, with bright, intense eyes. To me, it looked something like a coyote, but much heavier. Its coat was matted and thick, its muzzle hung partly open as it gazed at us silently, studying us as if astonished to find us there.

"The wagner animal," Labyrinth said thickly. "But it's changed. It's changed. I hardly recognize it."

The creature sniffed the air, its hackles up. Suddenly it moved back, into the shadows, and a moment later it was gone.

We stood for awhile, not saying anything. At last Labyrinth stirred. "So that's what it was," he said. "I can hardly believe it. But why? What —"

"Adaptation," I said. "When you toss an ordinary house cat out it becomes wild. Or a dog."

"Yes." He nodded. "A dog becomes a wolf again, to stay alive. The law of the forest. I should have expected it. It happens to everything."

I looked down at the corpse on the ground, and then around at the silent bushes. Adaptation — or maybe something worse. An idea was forming in my mind, but I said nothing, not right away.

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"I'd like to see some more of them," I said. "Some of the others. Let's look around some more."

He agreed. We began to poke slowly through the grass and weeds, pushing branches and foliage out of the way. I found a stick, but Labyrinth got down on his hands and knees, reaching and feeling, staring near-sightedly down.

"Even children turn into beasts," I said. "You remember the wolf children of India? No one could believe they had been ordinary children."

Labyrinth nodded. He was unhappy, and it was not hard to understand why. He had been wrong, mistaken in his original idea, and the consequences of it were just now beginning to become apparent to him. Music would survive as living creatures, but he had forgotten the lesson of the Garden of Eden: that once a thing has been fashioned it begins to exist on its own, and thus ceases to be the property of its creator to mold and direct as he wishes. God, watching man's development, must have felt the same sadness — and the same humiliation — as Labyrinth, to see His creatures alter and change to meet the needs of survival.

That his musical creatures should survive could mean nothing to him anymore, for the very thing he had created them to prevent, the brutalization of beautiful things, was happening in *them*, before his own eyes. Doc Labyrinth looked up at me suddenly, his face full of misery. He had insured their survival, all right, but in so doing he had erased any meaning, any value in it. I tried to smile a little at him, but he promptly looked away again.

"Don't worry so much about it," I said. "It wasn't much of a change for the wagner animal. Wasn't it pretty much that way anyhow, rough and temperamental? Didn't it have a proclivity toward violence —"

I broke off. Doc Labyrinth had leaped back, jerking his hand out of the grass. He clutched his wrist, shuddering with pain.

"What is it?" I hurried over. Trembling, he held his little old hand out to me. "What is it? What happened?"

I turned the hand over. All across the back of it were marks, red cuts that swelled even as I watched. He had been stung, stung or bitten by something in the grass. I looked down, kicking the grass with my foot.

There was a stir. A little golden ball rolled quickly away, back toward the bushes. It was covered with spines like a nettle.

"Catch it!" Labyrinth cried. "Quick!"

I went after it, holding out my handkerchief, trying to avoid the spines. The sphere rolled frantically, trying to get away, but finally I got it into the handkerchief.

Labyrinth stared at the struggling handkerchief as I stood up. "I can hardly believe it," he said. "We better go back to the house."

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"What is it?"

"One of the bach bugs. But it's changed. . ."

We made our way back along the path, toward the house, feeling our way through the darkness. I went first, pushing the branches aside, and Labyrinth followed behind, moody and withdrawn, rubbing his hand from time to time.

We entered the yard and went up the back steps of the house, onto the porch. Labyrinth unlocked the door and we went into the kitchen. He snapped on the light and hurried to the sink to bathe his hand.

I took an empty fruit jar from the cupboard and carefully dropped the bach bug into it. The golden ball rolled testily around as I clamped the lid on. I sat down at the table. Neither of us spoke, Labyrinth at the sink, running cold water over his stung hand, I at the table, uncomfortably watching the golden ball in the fruit jar trying to find some way to escape.

"Well?" I said at last.

"There's no doubt." Labyrinth came over and sat down opposite me. "It's undergone some metamorphosis. It certainly didn't have poisoned spines to start with. You know, it's a good thing that I played my Noah role carefully."

"What do you mean?"

"I made them all neuter. They can't reproduce. There will be no second generation. When these die, that will be the end of it."

"I must say I'm glad you thought of that."

"I wonder," Labyrinth murmured. "I wonder how it would sound, now, this way."

"What?"

"The sphere, the bach bug. That's the real test, isn't it? I could put it back through the Machine. We could see. Do you want to find out?"

"Whatever you say, Doc," I said. "It's up to you. But don't get your hopes up too far."

He picked up the fruit jar carefully and we walked downstairs, down the steep flight of steps, to the cellar. I made out an immense column of dull metal rising up in the corner, by the laundry tubs. A strange feeling went through me. It was the Preserving Machine.

"So this is it," I said.

"Yes, this is it." Labyrinth turned the controls on and worked with them for a time. At last he took the jar and held it over the hopper. He removed the lid carefully, and the bach bug dropped reluctantly from the jar, into the Machine. Labyrinth closed the hopper after it.

"Here we go," he said. He threw the control and the Machine began to operate. Labyrinth folded his arms and we waited. Outside the night came

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on, shutting out the light, squeezing it out of existence. At last an indicator on the face of the Machine blinked red. The Doc turned the control to OFF and we stood in silence, neither of us wanting to be the one who opened it up.

"Well?" I said finally. "Which one of us is going to look?"

Labyrinth stirred. He pushed the slot-piece aside and reached into the Machine. His fingers came out grasping a slim sheet, a score of music. He handed it to me. "This is the result," he said. "We can go upstairs and play it."

We went back up, to the music room. Labyrinth sat down before the grand piano and I passed him back the score. He opened it and studied it for a moment, his face blank, without expression. Then he began to play.

I listened to the music. It was hideous. I have never heard anything like it. It was distorted, diabolical, without sense or meaning, except, perhaps, an alien, disconcerting meaning that should never have been there. I could believe only with the greatest effort that it had once been a Bach Fugue, part of a most orderly and respected work.

"That settles it," Labyrinth said. He stood up, took the score in his hands, and tore it to shreds.

As we made our way down the path to my car I said, "I guess the struggle for survival is a force bigger than any human ethos. It makes our precious morals and manners look a little thin."

Labyrinth agreed. "Perhaps nothing can be done, then, to save those manners and morals."

"Only time will tell," I said. "Even though this method failed, some other may work; something that we can't foresee or predict now may come along, someday."

I said goodnight and got into my car. It was pitch dark; night had fallen completely. I switched on my headlights and moved off down the road, driving into the utter darkness. There were no other cars in sight anywhere. I was alone, and very cold.

At the corner I stopped, slowing down to change gears. Something moved suddenly at the curb, something by the base of a huge sycamore tree, in the darkness. I peered out, trying to see what it was.

At the base of the sycamore tree a huge dun-colored beetle was building something, putting a bit of mud into place on a strange, awkward structure. I watched the beetle for a time, puzzled and curious, until at last it noticed me and stopped. The beetle turned abruptly and entered its building, snapping the door firmly shut behind it.

I drove away.

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Mr. Porges' last story, THE RATS *(F & S F December, 1951) gave a brilliantly original twist to one of the basic themes of science fiction; i. e., what form of life shall inherit the earth from man? Now, he turns from science fiction to discuss — with remarkable understanding of the* life *involved — one of the oldest ideas of pure fantasy.*

Strange Birth

by ARTHUR PORGES

AT FIRST I was aware only of warmth and security. My thoughts were vague, more like dreams. But then I became convinced that above and beyond the smooth hard walls of my prison another world existed.

I began to shift about, feebly at first, then with angry movements, twisting in the narrow bounds of my drying cell. I cried aloud. How thin and weak my voice was! It revolted me, that weakness, and thereafter I chose silence, because deep inside I was conscious of strange powers. A flaming pulse of ego, of command, of being somehow dedicated, was beating a stirring drum-roll of pride. My blank-walled room became a dungeon.

There came a time when the whiteness was a glare, and an unusual warmth aroused my senses. I attacked the walls with new resolution. On my head a little prong appeared, hard and sharp, an ideal tool. Glowing with heat intoxication, wild for release, I thrust savagely against the brightest, thinnest part of the chamber, just before me. A tiny crack appeared, and a second running to join it. I threw my full weight forward, prying my tough horn into the weakened structure. The wall splintered; a large flake broke free, and I scrambled through.

How can I tell the wonder of that moment. The light! The light! It was everywhere, and a mighty warmth came from a dazzling glory overhead. And there before me was the whole new world, filled with sound, motion, color.

I stumbled weakly forward. All about were strange creatures that towered hugely above me. I did not resemble them in any way. I was small, clad in shining armor, deliberate in thought and motion. They — they ran stupidly about the enclosure, making raucous meaningless noises, pawing in the earth. They ignored me, continuing their frenetic activity.

All but one. She danced about me, making foolish querulous sounds. She

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disgusted me with her senseless clamor. Despite their size and agility — how cleverly they balanced on two spindly legs — it was obvious these creatures were not my peers. A royal anger filled me. They owed me homage as a being infinitely superior, yet only one had abandoned her hysterical pursuits long enough to notice my presence. She — the big yellow one — waltzed about solicitously, making coaxing noises. Her deference included too much admonition; she played the mentor as if I were somehow hers to guide. This air of proprietorship, of higher knowledge, was intolerable. Truly, she expected me to emulate her aimless clawing in the dirt. It was time to assert myself.

I raised my shining body high on its taloned legs. The moist weakness was gone; I felt hard, compact, dry. I gave the fluttering one a single terrible glance. It was instinctive; I had no way of knowing so soon. She stiffened, this nervous, brainless animal, who had not been still a moment. I increased the intensity of my gaze, thrusting my head forward. My tongue ran in and out. She twitched once, collapsed, and lay motionless.

Suddenly I became aware of a deadly threat. One member, at least, of that foolish gathering was perceptive. Instinct again came to my aid. Without conscious volition I located my dangerous opponent. A thready vibration of fear hummed within me, but I crushed it. He was smaller than the others, but of a different, sterner caliber; he wore a bright red flap on his arrogant head. The others made a path for him. He approached, paused, and began to rock on his toes. His mouth opened. I knew that if a single note rang out, I was doomed.

Before a sound could form, I sprang through the air towards him, and when I ended that mighty leap at his feet, I exhaled with all the force of my lungs. A burning, sparkling mist shot from my mouth. It swirled about his head in ragged streamers. The faintest gurgle came from his parted beak, and I felt a single warning pang. Then, with pink tongue lolling, he crumpled, his proud scarlet crest in the dust.

The others were at my mercy now. Let them run cackling and crying; they were too late with my due. One by one my arrow-glance flung them lifeless in the drab enclosure. There was no escape. The last died fluttering weakly in the gloom of an odorous chamber to which she had fled in vain. There, too, I found a creature, dirty brown in color, with a long naked tail and sharp teeth. It was larger than I, and had the temerity to jump at me. A single breath knotted the rash fool in death, and a companion scurried with terrified squeaks into a hole.

I re-emerged into the heady light where the fluffy ones lay quietly about. The heat made me quiver with delight; my tongue flickered madly.

Then a new sound insulted my ears. A shrill, piercing cry. A remarkable

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being had entered the enclosure. She dwarfed the others, soaring more than thirty times my own height. She was utterly unlike the scratching ones except in moving, as they did, on two legs.

She ran about among the dead, making gasping noises and stooping with wonderful balance to inspect each in turn. I crept towards her, and seeing me, she dropped the red-crowned one. New sounds came from her, thick and bubbly.

Suddenly there was a harsh deep cry of warning. Another giant, a male, wearing a long robe covered with odd designs, ran into the enclosure. There was little time to act. As the one before me cringed back, I summoned my forces and glared directly into her dilating blue eyes, feeling all my secret power pulse forth.

I whirled immediately to deal with the other, but he clapped one arm over his eyes and stumbled away. For a moment the stricken woman remained erect, every muscle quivering, then, swaying in a great arc above me, she toppled, striking the ground with a sodden thud.

Then I heard footsteps behind me, and realized the male had returned. This was well, I thought, for his escape had troubled me. There would be no running a second time. When the moment came, I whipped about. My claws gripped the earth, and I began the low, streaking run which the victim can neither intercept nor avoid.

After a few paces, I raised my eyes for the death-stare. A terrible shock went through me, for there in a glittering rectangle my own image glared back with shattering power, stopping my breath, numbing my brain, and flooding my whole being with anguish.

As I crouched there dazed, giant hands seized me from behind. At this indignity, I made a final effort, although sick almost unto death. If I could but once catch his eye — it was useless; his cunning grip held me firm.

A voice rumbled gloatingly, "Ah, at last! From the cock's egg I have hatched a true cockatrice! Pity about that fool kitchen slut, but what matter now. That's it . . . come to me, my pretty little basilisk!"

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James Blish's pictures of the future are like the best older Italian paintings, with every least detail of background meticulously and realistically filled in, while the viewer's attention is focused on the dramatic subject: the people in the foreground. (Which is, of course, just another way of saying that he's a darned good writer of science *fiction!) His mastery of his craft has rarely shown to better advantage than in this wry account of the abrupt exit of a rocket and its pilot from a world not ready for either one.*

First Strike

by JAMES BLISH

I DON'T think I'm going to like logging as a trade, but on the other hand I don't have much of a choice. The one profession I really know can't be practiced these days in the United States, and I don't care to practice it for the benefit of any other country, not even Canada. Besides, I'm supposed to be dead — and I'm going to stay dead until Carol gets up here.

Not that she's going to like my being a logger, any better than she liked my being a rocket pilot. The joke was on her, for there was supposed to be nothing she liked better than "roughing it." I should know; I roughed it with her all the way up to the day before spaceflight.

Not that there was any chance of her understanding either spaceflight or rocketry, as she had been at pains to make clear to me at once when I'd been assigned to the High Altitude Project. It was just that the job gave her a difficult row to hoe socially. Rocketry and spaceflight were both high on the social leprosy list, even in those days. All during the course of the Project we'd had to endure watching our erstwhile friends fall away from us; first the embarrassed, determinedly general conversation, then the forgotten date and the silent telephone, and at last, the cut direct.

By the time the evening for the farewell party came around, there was no one left but Jim and Dorothy McLaughlin — as, of course, we could have counted on. Jim and Dot are salt and soil; the essential kind of people, the kind that keeps humanity going through its periodic idiocies.

All the same, it was a gloomy sort of a party. After dinner we sort of sat for what seemed like hours, until it became obvious that nobody else

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was arriving. You know the old saw that when everybody in a party falls silent at once, an angel is passing over the house? The traffic was heavy over our summer shelter that night.

"What's the schedule for tomorrow?" Jim said at last. "I suppose you're all tooled up by now, since the flight's scheduled for the day after."

"More or less," I said. "All the essential details of the firing were set up months ago, of course. And as far as the mechanisms of the missile are concerned — well, they'll either work or they won't. They've been checked under resistance loads and so on a thousand times, and we'll be constantly rechecking until the last minute, but we don't expect to find anything wrong. How they'll behave against actual flightloads, instead of just resistances, is up for betting."

"Doesn't that leave you a day free, then, Wally?" Dot said. I could see that she was uneasy, despite her loyalty. As with Carol, the whole subject, like any subject connected with science, was frightening to her.

"No, Dot, it doesn't. You see, we still have to go through about 38 meaningless motions for the benefit of the public."

"But why?"

"Because they're scared. Hell, Dot, *you're* scared. You and they want to be told we aren't tampering with something that's going to hurt them. It's silly, but it's the way people feel."

"I don't know that it's so silly," Jim said slowly. "We've gotten to a point now where science seems to be paying us off in tragedy rather than in real profits. It began back at Hiroshima and it's been getting worse since."

"That's not true, but I know why you think it is. The Old Master and his ilk have done a pretty thorough job." The Old Master, of course, was the writer who had died that year; the man who had regaled the public with hundreds of stories about Mars, out of an abysmal ignorance of the probable actualities of that planet, but with a personal style which seemed to find no saturation point in most people. "For the past five years, all the most popular science fiction writers have been teaching their readers that the results of any scientific advance are automatically and entirely horrible. Now those readers believe it. Why shouldn't they? They take the science fiction writers to be the only interpreters of science that they have, which may even be so. These days we're even getting the same thesis from the pulpit and even from Congress."

"I think they're right," Dot said. "What good does it do us to know about the atom if it just blows us up in the long run? And why are we trying to get into space anyhow? There's nothing out there but a lot of nothing, and some balls of rock nobody wants. I think science at least ought to call a holiday and let us catch up with it a bit."

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"Now where have I heard that before?"

"So it's old," Jim said defensively. "But maybe it's no worse than a lot of old ideas. Maybe there *is* a point of diminishing returns for science. Or maybe we've just emphasized science too heavily. For instance, Wally, I think you're unfair to the Old Master. All he meant to do was to show the dangers of *over*-emphasis on technology. He didn't attack all science — his imitators and his fans misinterpreted him."

"Maybe," I said. "I've seen a couple of quotations from his own lips that make me think his imitators and his fans had his intentions dead to rights. If they're to be censured, it's for letting him do their thinking for them, not for misinterpreting him."

"What does it matter?" Carol said. "I'm tired of science, myself. I think it's going to lose me a husband day after tomorrow, unless I'm lucky. That's enough to make *me* dislike it."

"Exactly so," Jim said, with great seriousness. "Wally, let me ask you this, why are you going?"

"Somebody has to go," I said. "I happen to have the training."

"*Why* does somebody have to go?"

I throttled down my temper. "Because there's a place to go to. Because the whole process of increasing knowledge is irreversible. Because I personally want to know what it's like out in space, and on the planets."

"In short, irresponsible curiosity — the same irresponsible curiosity that gave us the atom bomb."

"You obviously know damned little about the atom bomb," I said. "If the Manhattan Project was 'irresponsible curiosity' then so was Pasteur's study of wine fermentation."

"Now wait a minute," Jim said stiffly. "There was a practical end in view there. He was hired by the wine people to save their product."

"All right, go back to Spallanzani. He had no practical end in view. All he wanted to find was whether or not bacteria arose by spontaneous generation, or had parents like the rest of us. Pure research — 'irresponsible curiosity.' Have you ever been sick, Jim?"

"Sure. I had typhus while I was in the Middle East with the Navy. I was sick, plus."

"Why didn't you die?"

"They gave me some antibiotic or other," Jim said slowly. "There are so many, it's hard to keep track of them. All right, I see your point. Now you see mine. Spallanzani's discovery was biological. It led by a long road to the antibiotics. It dealt with life, and it saved lives. But how do physics or astronomy expect to save lives and make things better for poor damn' fools like me? Am I happier because the physicists discovered the atom bomb?

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The hell I am. Am I going to be happier after you characters get your rocket into space? No, sir. I'm just going to have still another menace hanging over my head."

"Oh, for God's sake," I said. "Look, Jim, an orbital rocket is no menace to you or anybody else, not now, not with the political set-up the way it is. Years ago it would have been used as a bomb-launching platform, that I'll grant you. But I don't see any chance that it'll be needed for that now. Where's the danger?"

"What goes up must come down," Carol said complacently, working her knitting needles, and squinting in the candlelight.

"That's not true!"

"Don't you shout at me, Wally Swain."

"Carol's right," Dot said. "Who wants to have a couple of tons of electronic junk hanging miles above their heads for the rest of their lives? Talk about the Sword of Damocles!"

I stood up. "I don't think this is getting us any place," I said. "I'm going. I'm under orders to go, for one thing. For another, I want to go. In the long run nothing else can happen. Why not grow up and face it?"

Jim rose after me, his face flinty in the dim, uneasy light.

"It may be inevitable, Wally," he said. "But I don't have to like it. I think it ought to be stopped. You engineering boys have been hot-rodding it back and forth over us ordinary people for a long time. If we're not sick of it by now, we deserve anything we get."

We looked at each other. Somehow what I saw didn't look much like Jim McLaughlin any more. The face was Jim McLaughlin, but the eyes were Peking Man. I felt Carol's hand on my arm, but it didn't help much.

Jim and Dot were salt and soil — basically decent, the best in the long run that the Earth had to offer. I loved them both. But I was more than ready to take the first step toward another planet. . . .

The next morning I got out of bed feeling as if my sinuses had been packed with rock wool. It was pitch black. I groped for the candlestick and struck a match. Nothing happened. I swore and struck it again. This time it lit, with a terrific sputtering, a cloud of white smoke, and a vile smell.

Carol stirred protestingly. "Wally," she said. "Can't you finish a sentence without swearing?"

"All right. All the same this is the last goddamned morning I cope with these candles. Every last one of them goes out of the house today and tomorrow I'm having electricity run in here."

"You say that every day," Carol said lazily. "Besides, tomorrow you'll be shooting all over the sky in your toy. Hurry up and light the candle, dear, before you burn your fingers."

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She was a little late. In grim silence I struck another match twice and lit the candle. Last night, after the party, I had carefully placed a half dozen packs of her matches on the bedside table, but I had somehow scooped up a pack of my own along with them, and that had to be the pack I'd hit that morning. Damn roughing it, anyhow.

I put on the bright plaid woolose shirt with the lieutenant's bars, and struggled into my plastidenim dungarees. They were not new, but they remained an offensive, faded-type blue. No amount of mistreatment had changed their color or worked the creases out of them.

Having converted myself into a reasonable, hand-drawn caricature of an officer and a gentleman by act of Congress, I felt my way across the bedroom and unpolarized the windows. Carol covered her eyes pointedly as the bright sunlight came in.

"I'm sorry," I said. "If I could move the dial over beside the bed, I could let the sun in before you woke up — and I wouldn't have to fuss with that goddamn' candle."

"Anything to do things differently from the way normal people do them," she said. "You're the man who used to complain that people wouldn't let themselves become aware of what kind of a world they'd have to live in after the atomic war. Now that they're actually trying to train themselves to live under those conditions, you only grouse louder."

"But there's no longer any need —" I began. Then, "Oh, the hell with it! I've got to go. Are you coming out to the base today?"

"No, I'm going to archery practice with the wives."

"Okay. Don't wing any more Dobermans. The government doesn't pay me enough to survive two lawsuits in one year."

The knotted door squealed as I opened it. There was nothing wrong with the door; the squeal was attached to it in a little box, and the knots were paint.

I climbed on my motorbike and jolted toward the base over the rundown road. Our summer shelter was located in a discouraged forest of scrub and regrowth, about halfway between the base and the suburbs of the nearest large town. This was the best compromise we had been able to make. Being closer to the town would have meant less roughing it than Carol wanted, and being closer to the base would have meant more than she wanted. That kind of compromise.

Just how much "shelter" our so-called shelter would have provided, in the event of an actual atomic raid, was not even an open question. Like all summer shelters, it was really a flimsy affair. But that didn't matter.

During the Cold War of 1950–53, as Carol had reminded me, most Americans had allowed themselves to be pushed about by the civil defense au-

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thorities without the slightest emotional conviction that anything might happen to *them*. A few businessmen moved their bonds and records out of large cities, and some even bought concrete retreats in remote sections of Maine, but there had been nothing like any general preparation for survival at the level of the individual — nor any industrial decentralization, either. I do remember one exception. A New York showgirl who left the city to escape the Bomb, and built herself a cozy retreat in militarily uninteresting country near White Sands, New Mexico . . .

When the Cold War was abruptly called off, with the Partition of Europe in May 1954, the Soviet Union underwent a rather noisy change of government. After that, the threat of serious hostilities evaporated. *Then*, suddenly, my fellow citizens went into spasms of what was supposed to be preparedness. Something about the barbaric post-Bomb world, of which they had so often been warned without result, belatedly caught at their imaginations, and thinking in terms of it became a parlor game. Worse. It became a fashion in living. Commuters vied with each other in being earthy and red-blooded. The newspapers ran long, unlikely articles on how to survive in a collapsed civilization. "Going back to the soil" was talked about and backlot vegetable gardens overflowed onto front lawns in all the best suburbs.

The waterproof matches were a typical sample. Supposedly the post-Bomb world for which we pretended to be preparing was to be one in which we were going to be sopping wet most of the time. The matches were made by being dipped in water-glass or some similar substance. It took two scratches to light one. The first scratch got the sodium silicate off the tip, the second lit the match itself.

In the new barbarism, it was tacitly assumed, women would be largely helpless, and would exist to be dragged prettily about by the hair by the men. Consequently, women didn't have to carry the stinking waterproof matches; all match-folders were plainly marked "Hisn" or "Hern," depending on what kind they were. (Mangled English also was widely affected, as showing its user to be rough-and-ready.)

I was ready to admit that this invention had brought about at least one social gain. For years I had been accusing Carol of never having matches of her own. The division of match-folders into genders had proven it on her, and even had gone some small distance toward correcting it — she hated the stench of the waterproof tabs as much as I did, could never get them to light, and, since there was no pressure of custom on her to carry them, she remembered to bring her own about 32 percent of the time.

The rocket — the orbital missile, to be precise — came into sight as I left the scrub oaks behind. It was beautiful; pure, unencumbered, sexless

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and implicit with the ultimate freedom. It was like Brancusi's *Bird In Space* given function. I loved it.

I went to the barracks rather than to the launching dugout, in order to stay out of sight of Brig. Gen. Edgar Wallingford-Kentworth, ostensible director of the project. Actually the missile was the joint baby of the Navy, the Weather Bureau, the Bureau of Standards, and the FSA Satellite Vehicle Program, none of them organizations with much love for the Army; the general was a political appointee. The real head of the project was *the* Dr. Helmuth Eisenwald, a civilian garnished many years before from Aberdeen, and before that from Peenemünde. I knew he would be in the barracks, for the same reason that I was going there.

"Hi, Doc."

"Good morning, Wally. Are you all tuned up for tomorrow?"

"Tuned up? My God, Doc, I can't wait for it. I only wish we were really going to the Moon. The newspapers have us practically there already."

"The newspapers," Eisenwald said, his mouth taking on a German shape. "If it were not for them, we would all be home in bed, getting a little of necessary rest. All this fakery makes me want to vomit."

"You haven't lived here long enough. The fakery's essential. Have you heard about the Church of Gifts Held Back?"

Eisenwald shrugged, a gesture through which he was able to convey several hundred different meanings at will. "We have been through this religious business before. The Inquisition made Galilei recant, but Jupiter continues to have satellites. In this country evolution is even taught in Tennessee, in spite of a state law repealing Darwin's observations. Besides, Wally, the brigadier general has surrounded the base with marines; how many divisions can the fundamentalists muster?"

"That isn't the point, Doc. I'm as sure as you are that superstition can't stop our ship. But what about the ship after that — the one that's supposed to bring me supplies, and start the construction of the station? Wouldn't I look silly hanging in an orbit 1,075 miles straight up from here, waiting for another ship that never arrived?"

"That could not happen," Eisenwald said, alarmed. "The second missile is already half built."

"Half. You have no conception of the speed and the accuracy with which our Congress can reflect current idiocy. Way down at the bottom of the public mind there's always a strong current of common sense, but somehow it never finds its way to Washington. Oh, well, the hell with it. I'll let physics get me up there, and if the senators won't legislate me down again, I'll spit on their bald spots every time I pass over Washington. Now then, what are the actual launching arrangements?"

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I could tell by Eisenwald's expression that I had been talking too fast for him; he blinked twice before his mind seized gratefully upon the concrete query. "Let's go out to the ship," he said. "This barracks is too crowded."

An empty gallium tanker was being towed away from the ship as we crossed the field. There was otherwise not a great deal of activity.

"The actual firing you will do, of course," Eisenwald said. "But you will do it at a signal from outside — that is why we installed ship-to-ground television."

I paused on the ladder and looked down at him. "Wouldn't a simple light or sound signal, or even the ship's clock, have been enough?"

"No, because clock firing time is slightly flexible, and because you must be able to see the launching ceremony and judge for yourself what is the most convincing moment to push the key. That's why we gave you the test for deception — had you not wondered?"

"Yes," I said, ducking through the airlock and reaching down a hand to him. "I couldn't see that there'd be anybody for me to deceive, all by myself out in an orbit. I was about convinced that the Army wanted me to broadcast phony reports back to Earth while in flight."

"They may yet decide just that," Eisenwald said soberly. He sat down on a stanchion; I sprawled in the acceleration hammock. "I've heard rumors to that effect, at least. But there is a more important reason. We are trying to make this orbital rocket seem simple and understandable and peaceable to your laymen, to channel off as much of this anti-scientific hysteria as possible. One of the arrangements which we have made is to make it seem that the rocket is started from outside. Your psychologists tell me that of all our deceptions, that one is the most important. In an hysterical matriarchy, the rocket is a symbol with sexual overtones, and as such must not seem self-starting. If that deception fails, the others will. It will act as a trigger. So it must go as planned — or, as you say, there may well be no second missile for many years."

"There's got to be," I said. "Somewhere, other people are working on space travel. We're up to it, technologically, now, and we've got to strike for it now. If we're prevented by our own cumulative ignorance, somebody else will get in the first strike. . . . Well, what is the exact arrangement, Doc?"

Eisenwald smiled paternally. "That I choose not to tell you," he said. "As long as we had to install this video set, I have decided to put it to use in a small pleasantry for your benefit. A little, harmless ceremony, a fitting one, to send you off. I have told you all you really need to know; let the rest be my surprise."

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"Of course, Doc. You're a sentimentalist, aren't you? I am, too, about the ship anyhow."

He smiled again. "I think you are needed no more today, Wally. I see no point in your drifting around the base just in the hope of being helpful. Some corporal might set you to policing the area. Since you need rest, I dismiss you."

"Thanks, Doc." I thought about it. The acceleration hammock was comfortable, and the instrument-jewelled walls around me were beautiful. I thought about Carol, and the door with the built-in squeak, and the candlestick, and the summer shelters. Tomorrow I'd be gone — gone out, really out of a world which made no sense. I'd be back, of course — but if my luck held, only to go out again, farther, and more finally.

"I'll stick around here," I said. "I'll use the time to make myself at home in the cabin. There couldn't be such a thing as being too familiar with it. You could send me in a farewell dinner, and I'll give the disposal converter a try with the ship sealed. And I'll sleep in the hammock, too. At that I'll need practice."

"But Wally — your wife?"

I thought about salt and soil, and then about Peking Man — and Woman. I loved them, but all of a sudden I'd grown up.

"I'd about decided to do this, last night," I said, and I think it was true. "We made our real farewells this morning. If you'd phone her for me and tell her that I'm staying here as planned, I'd appreciate it. Frankly, I'm feeling a bit washed out — I'd just as soon not go through a second farewell scene. Bad for her, as well as for me."

He showed the completest and most satisfying misunderstanding. Doc was the one man in the world I hated to lie to, but some things are and must remain personal.

"That's most wise," he said. He seemed pleased. "All right, my friend. I will make my farewells here, also. Good luck."

We shook hands. His eyes were moist. Mine may have been, too.

I slept very comfortably in the hammock, and it was luxurious to be able to get light in the morning just by pushing a button right above the end of my nose. Nothing had changed; the walls glittered all around me. But why should anything have changed? Here was where I belonged, in a chamber I would never leave if I had my druthers. I was a born rocketeer; the tests had shown it, and I could feel it in every cell of my body.

I ate and generally made myself ready, then looked at the clock. It wouldn't be long now. Down below, I could hear the humming of the secondary generator, which provided the power to pull the damping rods out of the pile so that the pile itself could take over. While I listened it died,

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and the sound of the pile-driven primary began to whine up and up. Somebody was readying the ship from the small emergency board on the outside of the hull. That was considerate of somebody — Doc Eisenwald, no doubt.

The speaker said, "Wally, are you there?"

"I'm here, Doc. I'll take over now. Thanks for letting me snooze this long."

"You needed it. But now I have a newspaperman who wants to speak to you."

"I've already been interviewed 4,000 — oh, well, put him on."

The television screen lit up and a long, shrewd face stared at me. I stared back.

"Lieutenant Swain, I'm Bill Forehan, representing the wire service pool. We understand that you spent the night in the rocket, to get used to living in it. Is that right?"

"That's right."

"Would you tell us how it felt?"

"Cozy," I said.

"You had no trouble getting to sleep?"

"No, not a bit. The hammock is pretty thick and soft."

The newsman nodded. "Has to be, of course. No other sensations? Any feeling of being in space already?"

"No, not really. The gravity is too real to ignore. Of course I had a daydream or two, I'll admit."

That was the right note. The reporter could take it from there to the colleagues he represented and they all could evolve romantic, self-contradictory speeches for me to have made, to their hearts' content. He nodded again and went away.

As he left the screen I could see for the first time the crowd beyond. It was hostile and frightened. I had had no idea how scared it would be.

Two grease monkeys were walking along the concrete trough that led from the base of the rocket to the launching dugout, several hundreds of feet away. They were pouring something into the trough, something that dusted gently in the early morning wind. Beyond the dugout, a long way beyond, was a high wire fence, heavily patrolled by marines. Behind the fence was a deep trench filled with coils of barbed wire, and behind that was another fence.

Behind that fence was the crowd.

It muttered constantly, and there was a lot of catcalling. Farther back still, there was a sort of nucleus of disquiet, in the middle of which a tall figure stood out above the other heads, waving its arms wildly and shouting in apocalyptic tones. Now and then the crowd around it would shout back.

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I could see several men with medical department brassards pushing toward the preacher, one of them carrying a rolled-up stretcher like a spear. Evidently the fanatic already had succeeded in scaring somebody into convulsions.

I switched the scene out to take a look at the inside of the launching dugout. Speeches were already in progress, had been in progress for some time. Eisenwald had spared me most of them. The big P. A. speakers atop the second fence had given the crowd the whole stifling dose, however. As for the talk still remaining, I had the comfort of knowing that all speeches *had* to end by a given moment on the clock, and that that moment was not far off.

Among the group in the dugout I could pick out Carol. I hadn't expected her to be among the elect group, but I wasn't too surprised; Doc was a sentimentalist. Her face was extremely white and drawn. She'd taken my night in the cabin hard, of course; and besides, being terrified of rockets was integral to roughing it. Her expression made me feel a little funny.

Well, goodbye to all that. Up, up, and away, as the character in the cape used to say.

After Wallingford-Kentworth had run down, the announcer came on again, and introduced Eisenwald as a man who needed no introduction, which was true. Doc's voice was heavy, and trembling a little. Partly he was playing the role required of him, telling the lies that needed to be told, but much of the emotion was real.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said. "As you probably all know, the rocket will be fired from here. The method is very simple. Lieutenant Swain, inside the rocket — are you there, Wally?"

"Sure am, Doc," I said. Behind the dugout, facing the crowd, a big projection screen was showing a brief flash of me at the controls, grinning a confident, all-American grin. It had been taken on film weeks ago; without it, the crowd wouldn't have believed I was really in the rocket.

"Good for you. Lieutenant Swain, ladies and gentlemen, will release a small quantity of his fuel into the concrete pit you see right under the rocket, at the other end of this concrete trench, and will prime his engines. In the trench is a train of powder, which will be lighted right here, in the launching dugout. The light will travel down the trench to the pit, where it will fire the excess fuel and start Lieutenant Swain's engines. In short, what we have here is essentially a Fourth of July skyrocket with a long fuse, differing only in size from those with which you are all familiar —"

So that was it. Since my "fuel" — that is, the reaction-mass the heat of the pile would shove out the jets — was gallium vapor, no possible powder flame could ever set it on fire; it ran at a flat 2000° C. And the "concrete

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pit" Doc was talking about was actually the mouth of a long tunnel, leading to a 200-foot stack a mile away. Only after they had travelled that distance would the hot isotopes of the blast have cooled down enough to make it safe to release them on the air.

But I had to admit that it was a convincing dodge for the public which had been kept carefully ignorant of science for so many years by the anti-science fiction purveyors.

I could also see the reason for the ship-to-ground telescreen. I had to be able to see just when the powder train was touched off and to judge its rate of progress. On the clock were two red marks, one on either side of the zero point, a total of fifteen seconds apart. Any takeoff made within that fifteen-second period would be good; the ship's computer would trim the flight to the split second.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, we would like to introduce to you the most heroic woman of our time — a woman whose heroism is matched only by that of her husband. Mrs. Swain, would you come forward, please?"

She came forward. Something began to disturb me. I didn't then quite know what it was.

"Mrs. Swain, you are making an immense sacrifice for the sake of the whole human race. We want you to know that the world honors you today in equal measure with your husband. No human being, no government, has the right to compel such a sacrifice; no nation has the right to impose upon a citizen a parting with such enormous possibilities for loss. No hand but yours can put this great undertaking under way."

I looked at the clock. Close now. I put my finger gently on the red button.

Then I did a double-take and what Doc had said came through to me. I began to swear again. As a European, he had no real notion of the extent, of the minutiae, of the American worship of ignorance. He was travelling on sentiment —

"Mrs. Swain, we are asking that yours be the hand to launch this adventure. No woman in history has stood at a more momentous crossroads. It may well be that no woman of the future will ever do so much for mankind with so simple a gesture. Would you do us that honor?"

The mike panned to Carol. Her eyes were wide and glassy. I knew she was only in shock, but to the crowd she must have looked petrified with terror. Her mouth moved. She said, "Yes," but no sound came out. All of a sudden the screen went swimming in front of my eyes. I blinked angrily.

Carol fumbled in her survival kit and took out a folder of matches. Doc gave her the signal. She struck a match with trembling fingers and dropped it into the trench.

Nothing happened. The clock ticked toward the first red line.

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Another match. Again no result. "Twice, twice," Doc whispered urgently. "Strike them twice!" But she was too far gone to hear. The clock hand passed the first red line.

She struck another one, blindly. I could see Doc frantically searching his own pockets for matches, but he was a nonsmoker — and besides, who brings spare champagne to a launching?

"Fake!" someone in the crowd shouted. The shout was taken up.

The hand went by zero while she was trying to pull still another match free of the folder with her clumsy kitten's paws. Then Doc was trying to take the pack from her, his face twisted with desperation. She hung on with blind tenacity.

The moment of obvious struggle was more than enough for the crowd. It got the first fence down before the marines could even unlimber their rifles. The fence made an uncertain but sufficient bridge across the barbed wire. Carol was still striking matches, but they were, of course, "Hisn" matches, and it would never occur to her to strike them twice. She didn't understand how they worked.

She was still striking matches as the crowd roared up to the launching dugout. I saw Wallingford-Kentworth trying to begin a new speech. Eisenwald was weeping. The crowd-wave broke and frothed over the dugout, a sea of white, staring faces turned toward me.

At the crest of that wave I saw Jim and Dorothy McLaughlin. Salt and soil — and Mr. and Mrs. Peking Man.

The clock-hand reached the second red line, and I pushed the button.

The ship-to-ground television showed nothing but a blurred confusion by the time the rocket took me out of its range at 240 miles up. I don't know how many people were hurt by the initial shock; more than should have been, of that I'm sure. I saw nothing clearly but the faces of Dot and Jim, their mouths as round as O's, their eyes wide and glassy, rising after me like implacable balloons.

Now, however, I had myself to think about, and I had to do it in two and a half seconds, tops. I had taken off in time, and could put the ship in her orbit. But nobody would come for me up there, and I'd die there if I insisted upon being noble. On the other hand, I couldn't return to America, or I'd likely be torn to pieces. Maybe by Jim and Dot, if they were still alive.

I threw the ship high over Baffin Bay, set the controls for a good spectacular crash offshore of Lisbon — the kind of crash that would leave nothing but fused metal — and bailed out. It was easy, as easy as stepping off a ledge.

The passage of the anti-rocketry law is public knowledge. Considering the public's feeling about me — for the week-old newspapers that I see up

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here make it clear that I'm the villain, the man who defied the people and the laws of heaven and injured a lot of just plain folks while I was about it — it isn't safe for me in my own country now.

I wrote to Carol, not directly of course, but through friends in Mexico. And Carol ran true to form. She went in the wrong direction. I'm still waiting for my friends to put a forwarding address on her and ship her up here to the camp. It's a long distance between Mexico and Canada, and I don't think she'll like it when she gets here.

Nevertheless: All things considered, the rest of the world, America excluded, can have rocket fever without me.

I'm going to have more than enough excitement as it is, roughing it with Carol.

His Master's Voice

After slitting his butler's throat
With the useful blade,
Cutter walked out to the streetlight
To call his dog —
— No bite,
But the neighbors often complained when the animal bayed,
An eerie note.

"Here, boy!" Cutter chirps
At the edge of the circle. He heard in the yellow haze
Footfalls, after he spoke.
He came in the fog,
Replacing the head on the shoulders red from the stroke,
To him he obeys.
"Did you call?" says the corpse.

Winona McClintic

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Will Ready, librarian by profession and short-story writer by avid demand of such markets as the Atlantic *and the* Saturday Evening Post, *is by birth an Irishman and by choice an American. Nothing could be more Irish than the Ready stories we've previously published in F&SF, nor could anything be more American than this creation of a new and unsettling figure for folklore.*

Weerawannas

by W. B. READY

THERE ARE STORIES and stories. Some stories, about Ahab and the Whale, about the Moor Othello, about the Golden Fleece, are more than just stories; so is this story. If it was just a story it is barely worth the telling, but there are weerawannas and there is Parky Hart: there is the Child and there are Little People, and the more who realize that the better for us all.

The weerawannas seem to be to America what the leprechauns are to Ireland. There is more than a pot of gold for the man who captures one of them, there is far more, besides the great adventure. This adventure came to Parky Hart a little while back. Parky is five years old, the eldest of four children, all boys, and he lives, they all live, the whole Hart family, in the gatehouse of an abandoned old estate in the Santa Clara Valley of California. There was a time, years back, when the estate was a show place of the Peninsula; it is closed and shut up now, the big house too large for family living in these days, too awkward to become an institution. A high stone wall runs around the estate, broken where the driveway leads off from the road by two solid stone pillars, a tall iron gate between them. The name of the estate is carved upon the pillars in good clean letters: ALTA on the one, VISTA on the other: ALTA VISTA, meaning Long View, and it is a good name, for the estate encompasses the whole of one of the little foothills at the side of the valley. There is a noble view from the nob of the hill, where is the Big House, overlooking Lagunita, Stanford and the Bay, with the higher tree-clad clouded hills behind that lie between the Valley and the Ocean.

The gatehouse, roomy shabby old and shingled, stands just within the walls, and the driveway, with a chain across it barring all traffic, winds past it, climbing up to the top of the hill to the Big House, whose windows now gaze blindly out over the long and lovely view. The estate is tangling back

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into wilderness, save for a patch around the gatehouse where Parky's mother has a bit of a garden, of salads and of herbs. The driveway is greening in runnels and in patches where grass has pushed up through the gravel. Sometimes in the evening, after dinner, Parky and his father and the next two of the brothers saunter up the driveway — there is nearly a mile of it — towards the Big House and towards the view at the crown of the hill, while his mother is washing up or maybe bathing the baby. It is still and quiet then, with the sun going down. Trees, all kinds of them, unkempt and leafy, nearly meet with their branches overhead. Birds, and bats perhaps, dart flutter and wheel amid the trees over them. Sometimes Blackie the dog starts a rabbit, goes crashing off into the undergrowth, the cat pads along looking for a killing, a sitting bird, a baby gopher, or a field mouse. Along that driveway there Parky first saw weerawannas, and it was an historic occasion, for never before had a living soul seen them as they really are. Parky saw them just a little while back.

It was not of an evening time that Parky first saw them ahead of him, the pair of them, two tiny men the size of squirrels. They were standing resting, puffing a little, looking ahead up the driveway which wound on and on as far as they could see, on a hot and quiet Friday afternoon, when the gravel was warm to Parky's bare feet, when his father was away at his work, when his mother, with the other children, was settling down for an afternoon nap, in that hour or so of every day when Parky Hart, five years old, was the only man around the estate, the whole twenty acres of it. He generally stayed around the house, at that time, making his boats and houses and aeroplanes out of bits of wood and wire that always ended up as failures, drooping things, or sneaking back into the living room and turning on the television set quietly, chancing it, but on this day he went meandering all alone up the driveway, tall and skinny for his five years, with a clumsy chopped home haircut, wearing a cotton shirt and worn and dusty overalls, with his thoughts all miles away, nowhere in particular — just away.

Blackie his dog was not with him; Blackie was sleeping stretched out on the porch, and the cat was curled up on the bed with Vincent, Parky's next brother. Parky was alone, and as he saw the two small men ahead of him he pulled his hands out of his pockets, tucked his shirt in for some reason, and ran up after them. Parky was an ungainly runner, like all young things, and he pulled up so short, with his hands trying to pull him back like wings when he got to them and saw the two men turned and waiting, that he nearly stepped over them. The weerawannas were looking up at him from away down with no apprehension showing, nor any wonderment; they were looking up at him just like two grown-ups, which they are, in a way. Parky

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was delighted, there was a smile all over his face, and he crouched down on his hunkers and said Hi!, his mind aswirl with anticipation.

The two little men were very properly dressed, in a sober and seasonal style. They were wearing gray finely striped rayon suits, with neat black laced shoes, white shirts with collars and bow-ties, and with straw hats on, Panamas. There was something old-fashioned, conservative, about their style, but barring their size, they looked like two sound men, like bankers, like college deans. They had sharp and beady eyes, and wizened faces, their fingers were thin and plucking; they looked like many men. One of them had a briefcase under his arm, and he clutched it nervously as Parky squatted and closely perused them. It was very still and warm on the deserted driveway; the sunlight came through dappled by the overhanging trees. Swinging out of Parky's hip pocket, on a tangled length of grubby string, was his magnifying glass, a dime plastic one; Parky put it to his eye to see them more clearly. The two little men shrank as the enormified eye of the child looked them over, it was a shrinking of awe, not of fear — what had they, grown men, to fear from a child? — they thought, as well as they could, not yet realizing the situation.

Ephraim Signet, the one with the briefcase, spoke up to Parky, after gulping, after a little cough, nervously, as if he were at a Judgment:

"Boy! Is there a Big House up this road?"

Parky heard a sort of squeaking coming up to him, so he pocketed his magnifying glass and stretched out in the dry leafy empty driveway, with his ear right up against Ephraim, and the little man repeated the question.

Parky nodded, in a rapt sort of way, that caused the two visitors to group together, unhappily and uneasily. Their wizened faces were forlorn; they trembled; it was as if they were in the hands of God. Ephraim Signet swung his briefcase around behind.

"How far up this avenue is it, Boy?"

His voice, for all of his trying, was quavering with apprehension of Parky. They both looked pleadingly at him, and he saw that for all their tininess and neatness they were two tired old men who had walked too far already, whose feet were hurting them. There were several more turns ahead in the driveway, past the riotous spread of geraniums, past the bamboo thicket, past the water tower, up to the Big House; with no more ado Parky scrambled to his feet, picking the old men gently up, one in each hand. He brought them up against his chest, where they were squirming and writhing until he patted them and calmed them as he would his cat; not saying anything to them he trotted up the road towards the House, past the geraniums, past the bamboo thicket, past the water tower, and they lay quiet, realizing his good will. He set them down in front of the house, on the edge

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of the dried and cracked basin of the fountain on the matted lawn and squatted until his eyes were on a level with them. He was bursting with his big question — it had been on his mind since he had begun to run after them up the driveway. He whispered at them huskily.

"Are you leprechauns? . . . visiting?"

He asked them as naturally as he would have asked the same question of two leprechauns. The two little men, trembling and shaking, pulling themselves about, getting themselves neat again, pursed their lips, shook their heads snappishly at his big question. Parky didn't really think that they were leprechauns anyhow. They dressed like Americans, just like that law professor at the Summer School, who visited with his father. He looked so downcast, all the same, at their sharp denial, that Ephraim Signet shrugged his shoulders, like a banker admitting a loan, and, for all of his new fear, said rather testily, hastily:

"Leprechauns! Leprechauns! Of course we're not leprechauns! We're Americans, as American as . . . as . . . as apple pie! My name is Ephraim Signet. Here is Job Adams. We're weerawannas. We've come from Boston, delegates, here to a convention."

He turned on the rim of the fountain that was as broad as a road to him, and pointed at the Big House, as if it was the most natural thing in the world for the like of him to be coming to a convention.

"A convention?" said Parky, not even saying it right, let alone knowing what a convention was, and wondering what were weerawannas.

"Yes, Boy. A convention: a weerawannas convention. Last year we met at the old Doorman estate in New Hampshire; this year we have come to the Coast. We always meet in empty places to get away from it all. Look! There are the other delegates."

Parky looked where Ephraim was pointing, at the flagged courtyard that lay in front of the Hill House beyond the lawn: there they were, sure enough, little men everywhere strolling, taking their ease in the sun, some smoking, all talking so that faintly a squeaking filled the air. Parky had never seen anything like it. He was amazed. His mouth opened at it.

"Come along, Boy! Come along. Lift us down from here! Put us on the ground, come along. Careful! Don't step on anyone now! You come with us. It's very important. You're the first one . . ." he trailed off.

Parky set down his two new companions and lifting his feet up very carefully and putting them down again, the same way, clumsily, he followed Ephraim and silent Job through the thick of the weerawannas — there were scores of them — to where a knot of the most important ones were standing, with convention rosettes as big as nickels in their buttonholes. None of them were leprechauns, Parky could see that, for, whereas lepre-

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chauns were as small as these fellows, his book told him that no leprechauns would be out enjoying the afternoon air like these people — they would be crouched over their lasts, their mouths full of sprigs, making their fairy shoes, and they would be dressed in a queer old Irish way. There was a relaxed yet rather hectic air about these little people, all smartly dressed, with lots of hand-shaking and fervent greetings going on among them. The little knot of the important ones looked up as Parky came along behind his two leaders. Like all the rest they showed no fear at his approach: they looked at him the way that all busy old grown-ups looked at him, as far as Parky could tell.

Ephraim and Job hardly went into the business of hand-shaking and back-slapping with the group in the false hearty way that seemed to be a part of the convention — if Parky knew it is a part of all conventions; their eyes remained as beady and as sharp and they were worried. Their smiles were faint and fleeting. None of the assembled took any notice of Parky: they were aware of him, were rather offhand with him, and that was all.

Ephraim tugged at the sleeves, said something to the convention leader about Parky; what he said that one could not hear, for he was squatting down among them, not lying down with his ear to the ground; he just heard the squeaking and saw them look up at him, very startled and alarmed. One of them with a hearty bluff and florid face, dressed more in a California style than were Ephraim or Job, or most of the delegates — he was larger than those around him, as a raccoon is larger than a squirrel — beckoned up to Parky, who carefully lifted him and set him on his shoulder. The little man stepped up so that his mouth was very near to Parky's ear.

"Boy! How come you can see us like you do?" The question was asked without any undertones; it was just a straight question. Parky turned his face around to see the speaker, and he looked so wide-eyed and uncomprehending that the little man started again, quite boldly, for all his inner fear.

"How come that you can see us like you do, Boy? We don't want to be bothered by boys! Nobody ever sees us this way! How come that you do?"

The question baffled Parky. He shrugged his shoulders, nearly dislocating his interlocutor. He twisted his head around, and his companion slid down into the crook of his arm, where he lay like a cat would, or a rabbit, his finely sporty clothes rather crumpled and wrinkled, and his red swollen face puffing with curiosity and with anxiety, so that his face was awry. He crawled up to Parky's shoulder again.

Parky said: "In Ireland they can see the leprechauns."

"Ireland! Ireland! They can see the leprechauns in Ireland! Of course they can! Some of them! That is in Ireland, where everybody knows about the Little People! Nobody knows about the Little People in America! We

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don't have to hide in holes over here! We walk about as free as air — see? Only ourselves know how small we are. We look just right to everybody else. This is America, Boy!"

He looked sharply at Parky at that.

"Are you an American, Boy? Native-born?"

Parky nodded yes.

Leroy Leland shook his head, his face wattling and purpling with vexation, fear and worry.

"If people start seeing us the way we really are, the way you are seeing us, Boy, we'll have to go underground, and then where will we be? Where will *WE* be? Where will *EVERYBODY* be? Look!"

He plucked at Parky's cheek so that he got him looking around at the assembly, still all serene, promenading and chatting, except for the worried little group of executives around Ephraim and Job.

"Look! There is Bishop Stole and Senator Rotund. General Baggonet is over by the carriage step talking to Reuben Skroog, the President of the Millstone Savings and Loan Corporation. There is Professor Sogood, him with the levis on, he's the Western historian, and talking to that crowd of men there is Lollie Flanks the film star, the delegate from Hollywood, there are lots of us down there . . ."

"Who are those?" said Parky pointing, interrupting.

Leroy looked along Parky's arm, and breathed a momentary sigh of relief.

"Oh, yes. That just goes to show you. . . . Those people are weerawannas, too. We weerawannas are not just a social group, there is nothing Shrineish about us. Why, some of my best friends are Jews, and there are Catholics in our organization, too. Those people over there are quite poor, see? That doesn't stop them from becoming weerawannas. Anybody can join, if they want to. We have several colored members, delegates, here today. As long as a man or a woman makes himself small enough inside he can join. Yes, Boy!"

Parky saw that Leroy Leland was quite proud of being a weerawanna. Of course, he had to be to be one, but Parky knew nothing of that. He was just taking it all in, the way children do.

"Who made you a weerawanna?"

"Nobody makes a weerawanna, Boy. Those people just wanted . . ."

His voice trailed away; a mean sly bad look came into his yellowing bloodshot eyes, he licked his lips, his fingers rubbed against one another. Parky looked straight back at him. Wheedling, fawning, Leroy said to him: "Would you like to be a weerawanna, Boy? We would teach you to be so big outside and so small inside that . . ."

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His voice failed away, he shook his head; it was no use. Parky was too young, still in God's hands, safe.

He looked at Parky again, calculatedly, yet recklessly.

"Put me down, Boy. Now don't go away. I've got to have a talk to these people. Wait! Wait!. . . . Don't go away. . . ." His voice went into a faint far-off bat-like squeak as Parky put him down on the ground, to run amid and through the crowd, waving and calling them to follow him up into the hall of the Big House.

Then a very strange thing happened: Parky saw the weerawannas, all of them, following Leroy Leland, trooping up into the hall of the Big House. The steps that led up from the courtyard were big stone ones, nearly as tall as the Little People themselves, yet they went up them with no trouble at all, just as if they were grown-ups, and the last one in shut the door behind himself with a twist of his heel, quite easily, yet the door towered over him like the Bay Bridge.

It's very strange, thought Parky, and got up from his squatting, stepped over the courtyard up on to the veranda, and looked in through a window at the weerawannas in the hallway, and he got another surprise: they were all standing or seated around the big hall table, with Leroy at the head of it, sitting down, and while they were as small as ever, and the tables and the chairs were as big as ever, they fitted. It was as if there was an outer and invisible shell to them, and all that Parky was seeing was their minimized inside souls. It was strange to see, thought Parky. He leaned against a pillar and watched in.

Leroy Leland called them all to order. Crisis is come upon us, he said; he told them of Parky, that he could see them as Little People, and the holiday joshing atmosphere of the convention departed as by magic. They could not even see themselves as Little People: they only knew that they were — it was in knowing it and liking it that they were weerawannas. Bishop Stole's fingers nervously hovered around his mouth, shaking, thinking of what would happen if a congregation saw him dwindling in full canonicals. . . . Senator Rotund began to sweat, lightly, steadily, all over. General Baggonet . . . Leroy slapped the table like the major executive that he was, interrupting their reflections. He was shaking, spluttering, still talking:

"Action! We want Action! Hamlin Brunswick and Weser tell us in their annual report on the State of the Nation that our future has never been so bright, that it has never been so dangerous! There are more weerawannas than ever before — that last ad *From Cradle to Casket* brought them running in — but there are more people less likely to become weerawannas than ever before in the history of this Republic. It's up to each and everyone of us to spread the word for weerawannas. . . ." He went on talking but his

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eyes wandered, the eyes of all of them wandered to the window, to the Child on the outside looking in on them. When Leroy faltered to a halt in that chilly dusty room — he was the keynote speaker anyway — they all just sat there, looking out at Parky, until he left them, going off down the hill again. As he was going he began to wonder whether if he tied his wagon to Vincent's bike, and put the cardboard box on top of it, and then . . . he saw a blue jay in front of him and he began stalking it, because if he had the blue jay he could build a . . . if he harnessed Blackie to a wagon then . . . there is Parky Hart, and there were the weerawannas, in that old deserted house. They have no idea what it means, the weerawannas, that Parky can see them, nor does Parky, but the weerawannas are worrying about it, all around you. Look around: if you see what Parky saw, you are in a state of grace, better than a pot of gold, that, or you're a weerawanna.

The Two Voices

Tiny paws come and go
In the garden.
"Quo vadis in the lettuce?"
— She's a Hare —
Do we know?

Beady eyes come and stare
In the house.
"Quo vadis in the curtain?"
— He's a Mouse —
Are we certain?

Spies from Outer Space unnerve us,
If they get us.
"Quo vadis in the closet?"
— I'M A THING —
saints preserve us! save the king!

Winona McClintic

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An up-and-coming young writer of detective stories here, for the first time, invades the science fiction field — and teaches us that there are some aspects of interplanetary invasion not covered even in Groff Conklin's definitive anthology.

The Happy Traitor

by MORRIS HERSHMAN

ALL EARTH ROLLED out the red carpet for a determined but still dazed Curt Marlin in the month of February, 1983. The honors began with a whopping big parade up Lower Broadway to City Hall.

"My only wish now," Curt said, holding the key to the city, "is to live in peace and obscurity."

In the next few days he was given fourteen civic parades and offered ninety jobs. Being a blond giant who could break a robot in two with his bare hands, he received 118 proposals of marriage.

"Darling," Curt told his wife, "I wouldn't have any of these women on a bet. I hope that the general public forgets about me in a few weeks."

Maybe he had no right to expect it, he'd done so much. Briefly, Curt, an Interplanetary Ranger, had almost by himself saved Earth from invasion by another planet. The green men had solemnly promised him that they would never interfere in Earth matters, and there was no telling how many humans were still alive because of Curt Marlin.

On this occasion he sincerely thanked everyone — "You've been finer to me than words can say" — and tried to get back to living quietly on his little farm in the town of Shifting Sands. He was asked to endorse cigarettes, cigars, matches, butters, cheeses, soft drinks, insecticides and even beauty creams. A big city toy outfit began selling Curt Marlin interplanetary suits, Curt Marlin masks, and a Curt Marlin space gun with Curt's picture on every bullet. It goes without saying that *The Adventures of Curt Marlin* could be viewed on telescreens from pole to pole.

But his name was generally used without permission. A journalist in Saskatoon founded the *Curt Marlin Daily Bugle;* a fellow in Des Moines originated Curt Marlin Bicycles ("Smooth as a space trip," ran the ads); and Curt's wife Mary nearly hit the ceiling when some enterprising manu-

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facturer of ladies' undergarments brought out on the market an item called a Curt Marlin Featherfluff Bra.

"Curt, dear, can't you do *something?*"

"I'm going to," said the hero who had obtained a verbal promise from the green men. On his trip to Earthopolis, the President swore full co-operation from this moment. Curt was showered with medals, honorary degrees and, the weather not holding up lately, showers. "After all, you're a hero," the President said.

Curt sincerely thanked the people of Earthopolis — "You've been finer to me than words can say" — and confidently started back to obscurity. On Broadway a teleplay opened called *Curt Marlin, Interplanetary Ranger*, and Vox Telepix was rumored to be showing considerable interest in the first telepix serial rights. His giant image could now be seen on every can of Curt Marlin Soup ("Marlin Soup is a darlin' soup"). A woman journeyed from Lhasa, Tibet, because she wanted to die in Curt Marlin's arms.

"Enough," said Curt, "is enough. No human being is worth all this bother, promise from the green men or no promise. If I don't stop this business, it'll drive us all crazy."

"People would do anything for you," said Mary with her quiet smile, "except leave you alone."

Certainly she was under a strain. In order to give them a little privacy their farmhouse had to be guarded by half a dozen Country Troopers. Worst of all their son Jeremy was being tutored, as any group of public school kids would have mobbed him to death the minute they saw him.

"There's one way out." Mary thumped her plasteen kitchen table so hard she nearly shattered it. "We must move to another planet. We must!"

Curt applied in secret to the Interplanetary Travel Commission, but the story leaked to the telepapers and he was promptly invited to 700 farewell dinners; Curt Marlin had received a solemn verbal promise of non-intervention from the green men and he'd have to find out that all Earth was grateful.

"Even," as somebody said, "if it kills his family."

Curt settled for 50 dinners, and Mary gritted her teeth. At number 46 the blow fell when a sheet of telescrip was handed up to the toastmaster and a broad smile shone on his face.

"I have some splendid news for all of us here on Earth!" he proclaimed.

"Thanks to pressures exerted on them from all corners of our mighty planet," he went on, after a stage pause for effect, "the I.T.C., or Interplanetary Travel Commission, has announced that it will not permit Curt Marlin to leave Earth in a civilian capacity. Let's have three cheers for the hero!"

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While the crowd was lustily singing "For he's a jolly good Earthman," a white-faced Mary told Curt that she was taking Jeremy and leaving him for good and all.

Ten minutes after seeing that proud back for the last time, Curt Marlin made his final decision.

He soon rejoined the Interplanetary Rangers. One afternoon Curt left his company, and was last seen heading for the planet Quuntal, inhabited by the green men. Three days later Earth saw in its skies the first rocket ship. No blood was spilled during the invasion.

Curt's status under the new regime couldn't have been nicer. Having freed them from their original promise of non-intervention made Curt a hero to the green men; having made them promise non-intervention in the first place marked him as their enemy. The green men shrugged off the paradox and carried on as if Curt didn't exist.

Mary and Jeremy came back to him after a while, and they moved out to another small town. Since Curt has betrayed the mother planet, his neighbors leave Curt, Mary and Jeremy pretty much alone, as a kind of punishment.

The three of them are taking it bravely.

One-Point Landing

Taken from the Commercial Advertiser *(New York), May 7, 1800*

Blanchard, the aeronaut, lately after ascending in his ballon, alighted near Nantz; but the conclusion of the expedition had nearly proved fatal. A peasant who knew nothing about ballons or aeronauts received him in a very rude manner; and thinking that he must be in league with the devil, attempted to stab him with a knife.

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Members of the faculty of that unnamed university where Cleanth Penn Ransom holds down the chair of mathematics lead a harried life; at any moment the great man (oblivious of any protestations from Professor MacTate!) may include them and their departments in his blithe disruption of the established order of time and space. (You'll remember that such diverse departments as those of athletics and the drama have felt the impact of Ransom's genius.) Observe now the good Colonel Flowerbottom, head of the university's ROTC, one of several innocent victims tripped up by the chain of events that began when Ransom started out to invent "an automobile tire you could change without twisting a lot of nuts."

The Maladjusted Classroom

by H. NEARING, JR.

"GIVE ME a place to sit," said Professor Cleanth Penn Ransom, of the Mathematics Faculty, "and I will move the world." He leaned back in his swivel chair, stuck out his little belly, and looked at his wristwatch.

Professor Archibald MacTate, of Philosophy, lit a cigarette and regarded him poignantly. "Really, old boy, isn't the world in a bad enough fix without your —"

"No, no, MacTate." Ransom laughed. "I just wanted to see if you'd catch me. It ought to be 'stand.' *You* know." He folded his arms behind his head and began to swing back and forth. "And the world is just a figure of speech, because I'm only going to transpose the United States Army. Part of it. But of course since I'll probably be sitting down —"

"You're going to what?" MacTate pulled the icosahedral ashtray across the desk, purging his memory for any possible connection between Ransom and the military.

"I'm going to transpose Colonel Flowerbottom's ROTC class." Ransom looked at his wristwatch again. "We got scheduled in the same classroom at the same time. By mistake. So we've got to make some adjustments to fit into it."

"We?" MacTate looked up suspiciously.

"The Colonel and me. I've got a class in analysis situs, and he —"

"Analysis what?"

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"Situs. Geometry of position. Suppose you want to make a tube with no inside and no outside —"

"But does anybody actually want to study that?"

"Sure." Ransom blinked with dignity. "Five men signed up for it."

"And you're displacing a big ROTC class for the sake of five people?" MacTate eyed his colleague reprovingly.

"Not displacing," said Ransom. "Transposing. Into another dimension. The only other room open at that hour is over next to the new hydroponics building they're putting up. Too much racket to hold a class there. So we agreed to both stay upstairs in 417 where we were assigned. The Colonel and me."

"And what dimension are you going to transpose them into?" said MacTate. "As if I didn't know."

Ransom grinned. "Look. Here's a two dimensional classroom." He took a tablet and a pencil out of his top desk drawer and drew a large rectangle on it. "With two dimensional students in it." He sketched in a series of circles, putting a smaller circle on top of each one for a head and two sticks underneath for legs. "Suppose you want to get another two dimensional class in at the same time. All you've got to do is swing each student out at right angles to the plane of the room, and the other class can come into the vacated spaces. Right? Of course the transposed students have to leave one foot in the room so they can pivot back again. But the other class won't be disturbed by a bunch of shoes."

MacTate studied the sketch. "And the teacher?"

"Swings right out with them." Ransom drew a two dimensional teacher at the front of the classroom. "If he doesn't twist out at the same angle as they do, he might look at them broadside and see a cross-section of their insides." He pointed at the center of one of the circles. "See, these outlines represent their skins, and the bounded regions are their insides. But that shouldn't bother the Colonel."

MacTate smiled. "So now all you have to do is discover a method for swinging the students out of their continuum."

"Oh, that's easy." Ransom looked up. "The tough part was talking the Colonel into trying it out." He reached into his top drawer again and tossed a thick packet of memorandums over to MacTate. "That's his correspondence on the subject."

MacTate read the first and last memorandums. The first said:

"Dear Ransom: In re the bi-occupancy of room 417 by your class of 5 and ROTC section 2C. This is to advise you that the Fifth Army does not tolerate bi-occupancy of this nature in the administration of the ROTC program. As of this date you will evacuate your class of 5 from the room

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indicated in order to immediately make it available to the ROTC section. It is hoped that it will not be necessary to report this matter to the Fifth Army. J. R. Flowerbottom, P.M.S. & T."

The last said:

"Professor Ransom: Due to the fact that the Dean has not seen fit to concern himself in the matter of the bi-occupancy of room 417, and it is wished to delay reporting this situation to the Fifth Army until all available solutions have been investigated, you may proceed with plan B at 1400 on 7 October only. It is understood that your class of 5 will be de-activated for the testing period. Be advised that the decision of the Fifth Army as to subsequent procedure will depend on the success of this demonstration. J. R. F., P.M.S. & T."

MacTate looked up. "What was plan A?"

Ransom grinned. "That he should move over next to the hydroponics thing. He decided right off that the Fifth Army wouldn't tolerate that either."

"And so you're going to try plan B on" — MacTate glanced at the date in the memorandum — "why, that's today. See here, Ransom, you don't mean you actually have a method for —"

"Transposing them." Ransom nodded. He drew two concentric circles inside the two dimensional classroom on his tablet. "See, you take a two dimensional ring like this, cut through it at one place, and put a magnet on each side of the cut with similar poles facing each other. What will happen? The magnets will swing around so the opposite poles can come together, and you've got a Moebius strip. Two dimensional thing that twists through the third dimension. So if a two dimensional student sticks one hand up around the twist and then reaches out with the other hand to clasp them together, he can pull himself out into the third dimension."

MacTate frowned. "But if it's a three dimensional student that aspires to the fourth dimension — I trust it *is* the fourth dimension you intend to put the Colonel in? —"

"That's right." Ransom nodded. "You simply make a three dimensional Moebius strip that twists through the fourth dimension. It's called a Klein bottle." He opened his bottom desk drawer. "Suppose you took a bicycle tire, cut through it, and stuck electromagnets in the two holes, positive poles out. Under certain conditions the magnets would twist around through the fourth dimension to join the ends of the tire together while they're facing in the same direction, like two hoses running into one nozzle, and you'd get this." He reached into the drawer and held up something that looked like a section of a bicycle tire, though the ends were indistinct, like a badly focused photograph.

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"What's wrong with the ends?" MacTate crushed out his cigarette and leaned forward to peer closely at the curved cylinder. "What makes them shimmer like that?"

"They're not ends. They're intersectors of the fourth dimension." Ransom ran a finger along the tire. When his finger reached the end of the visible section, the tip disappeared. "See. It's a whole tire, only part of it's twisting through the fourth dimension so you can't see it. If I ran my hand on up around it and then reached out with the other one —"

"No, no." MacTate grabbed convulsively at Ransom's sleeve and pulled his hand away from the tire. "If you're going to float away into hyperspace, I want witnesses around to testify I had nothing to do with it."

Ransom grinned. "Look, MacTate. You don't float away into hyperspace. You keep one foot in this continuum, see? So you can always come back when you want to."

"How?"

"Well, take this fellow for instance." Ransom pointed at one of the two-dimensional students on the tablet. "Since a plane is determined by three points, all he has to do is grab his pivot foot with both hands, so three parts of him will be back in the continuum, and then three of his friends can pull him all the way back. Your three dimensional student just has to add the other foot so you can stretch four points of him out."

MacTate stared at the tire. "How on earth did you make a thing like that?"

"Like I told you." Ransom leaned back and started to swing again. "I cut the tire and stuck magnets in the holes." He looked at the section with a hint of perplexity. "It was really sort of an accident, I guess. I was trying to work out an automobile tire you could change without twisting a lot of nuts. Like chains. You know. Just wrap it around the wheel and snap it shut. Only I was using a bicycle tire, because it's smaller and easier to experiment with. Well, I must have got one of the magnets in backwards by mistake, because all of a sudden there was a big bang and here was this thing."

"Why didn't you take it apart to see?"

Ransom shook his head. "Remember the story about the mechanical leg Benjamin Franklin made for Captain Dogbody? They took it apart to see how it worked, and couldn't ever get it back together again. See, I was experimenting in a cold box. Had it good and cold to simulate the worst possible weather you might have to change a tire in. The trouble is, I'm not sure just what the temperature was. At the time of the bang, I mean. Afterwards it was different, on account of the heat released by the thing twisting around like that. So when I tried it with another tire, it

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wouldn't work. The temperature that first time must have been just right for weakening the continuum enough to let the ends fly —"

He was interrupted by a knock on the door. "That must be him now." He looked at his wristwatch and then at the door. "Come in."

A young man dressed in an ROTC uniform opened the door and looked uncertainly at Ransom, as if wondering whether to salute him. Finally, with a nothing-to-lose expression, he did. "Sir, the Colonel said to tell you he's ready."

"Right." Ransom grinned. "You go on ahead and announce our entrance." He got up and grabbed the Klein bottle. "Come on, MacTate. It's zero hour."

"But old boy. Do you think the Colonel —"

"Sure. You're an official observer. For our side."

The chair behind the teacher's desk in room 417 was occupied solidly by a person who had learned to live with suspicion. It was in his eyes. He had an apoplectic complexion and close-cropped gray hair.

Ransom and MacTate marched down the aisle between the rows of uniformed students. "All right, Colonel," said Ransom. "Ready for the big push?"

The Colonel eyed the Klein bottle in Ransom's hand. "Now get this, Ransom." He plunged a stubby finger at him. "If this idea of yours isn't completely satisfactory —"

"I know, I know." Ransom waved at him soothingly. "The Fifth Army and all that. But you'll be delighted with it. The arrangement." He looked around at the students. "Here, let's start with this man." He pointed to a student in the front row and went over to him. The student rose to attention. "Look." Ransom grabbed his right hand and put the Klein bottle into it. "Slide your hand up around this till you feel a twist in it, then let go and straighten your arm over your head."

The boy looked startled when his hand disappeared, but followed Ransom's instructions and turned to him, wide-eyed, with his whole arm invisible.

"That's it." Ransom pulled the Klein bottle away. "Now hold your right arm steady and reach up with your left hand till you can clasp your hands together."

The boy squeezed his lips together grimly, twisted his shoulders, and began to grope in the air with his left hand. "Can't find it," he grunted.

"Sure you can," Ransom said enthusiastically. "Keep trying."

The boy writhed and grimaced like a uniformed Laocoön. His forehead grew damp. "I can't do it," he said. "It's like trying to find a keyhole in the dark."

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"Look." Ransom jabbed a finger at him. "Forget you're in a classroom. You're a boxer. Heavyweight. You're meeting the champion. For the title. Madison Square Garden, fifteenth round. Suddenly you see an opening. Out snakes your left. He staggers. This is it. You follow up mercilessly. Right left, right left. He's down. Neutral corner. Now the referee. Onetwothreefour — *ten*. He's out. You're champion. Champion. The crowd goes wild. You raise your arms in triumph, high over your head —" Ransom swung his arms up. His glassy-eyed auditor imitated his motion, and abruptly there was nothing left of the boy but a leg. Ransom lifted his foot and kicked the rigid extremity gently behind the knee. All of it disappeared but the shoe.

Ransom pinched his nose and regarded the shoe thoughtfully. "There must be some easier way to —"

"Now see here, Ransom." The Colonel got up and walked stiffly over to face him. "If he's — out there, how can he see me?"

Ransom raised his eyebrows. "You go out with him."

"I go —? Now see here, Ransom." The Colonel fixed him with his eye and shook his head ominously.

"Here. Try it." Ransom seized the Colonel's hand and put the Klein's bottle into it. "It may seem a little — odd. At first. But when you get used to it, you won't want any other arrangement. Makes cribbing in tests next to impossible."

The Colonel looked at the thing in his hand with open hostility.

"Slide your hand up. Like this." Ransom grabbed his elbow and pushed it up. The Colonel's arm disappeared. "That's it. Now clasp your hands together." Ransom pulled the Klein bottle away and stepped back. The Colonel lifted his other arm and groped spasmodically in the air, twisting like an eccentric dancer.

Ransom leaned toward MacTate and spoke without moving his lips. "Wonder if we could sort of startle him into swinging out."

MacTate frowned dubiously. "I don't know, old boy. I don't think I'd —"

"Well, we've got to figure out some efficient way to get them out there. It's an experiment. He'd understand."

"All the same, I don't think — No, Ransom. Don't —"

"*Achtung*, Colonel." Ransom swung his arm back and hurled the Klein bottle, like an oversize quoit, straight at the Colonel's diaphragm. There was a thud and an explosive "Oof," and the Colonel's arm reappeared. But his head was gone.

"Didn't work," said Ransom. "Here, MacTate. Help me pull him back and we'll start over." He grabbed the Colonel's arm and gave it a violent jerk. The head did not reappear, but both legs vanished up to the knees.

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"Come on, MacTate. I can't do it by myself." Ransom grasped the arm again, but it was snatched angrily away, and forthwith all of the Colonel disappeared except the hand.

"I thought you said it took four people, old boy." MacTate looked apprehensively at the Colonel's hand, which had doubled into an irate fist.

"My God, that's right." Ransom surveyed the students, some of whom had risen to watch the proceedings with macabre glee while their less scientific classmates sat in stunned horror. "Let's see. You" — he pointed to one of the more avid expressions — "and —"

"Look, Ransom. He's — churning about." MacTate pointed.

The Colonel's fist was replaced by a knee, a shoulder, and an unidentified portion of the anatomy, all in rapid succession. At last a patch of gray bristle appeared and rolled up to reveal his head. His eyes were popping.

"Ransom," he bellowed. "You lunatic! You butcher! You've murdered him. Blown him to bits."

"Him?" Ransom looked confused. "Who?"

The Colonel's hands appeared beside his cheeks, and he extended his arms back into the third dimension. "Him." He pointed at the patient shoe of Ransom's first victim. "Poor chap. And I let you do it. His organs, floating all over out there — It's horrible. It's —"

"Oh, my God!" Ransom turned to MacTate. "I forgot to tell him about looking through the insides of the class. Look, Colonel." He turned back to the head and arms. "The boy is all there, only —"

"Only in a hundred fragments. You criminal." The Colonel's arm shook an agitated finger at Ransom. "Mark my words, Ransom. This is not mere disrespect for the Fifth Army. This is an atrocity. You have a man's blood on your —"

"Look, Colonel. If you'll just let me explain —"

"Explain." The Colonel's head snorted. "I recall only too well your plausible explanation of plan B." Suddenly the cold fury in his eyes turned hot. "But you'll blow no more innocent men to bits." His arms reached down for the Klein bottle.

"No, look, Colonel. It didn't do anything to *you*, did it? This boy — No! Wait —"

The Colonel's hands had disappeared at the top of the Klein's bottle. His red face showed signs of extreme muscular exertion. Suddenly there was a miniature thunder clap, and the space the Colonel had occupied was entirely empty.

"The Klein bottle. He broke it." Ransom picked up a severed bicycle tire with iron bars stuck in its ends. "Look at it. All three dimensional." There

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was a hint of hysteria in his voice. "God knows how we'll ever get it together again. Benjamin Franklin's leg —"

MacTate was not listening. With a horrified glance at the place where the Colonel had been, he grabbed the experimental student's ankle and began to tug at it. Nothing happened. With a sorrowful shrug he took a pack of matches from his pocket, inserted a match, head out, just above the insole of the shoe, and lit it with another. As the flame approached the leather, the shoe shook violently and two hands materialized to slap at it. "Grab them." MacTate motioned two students to seize the hands. "Three points. Now let's — maneuver him." They began to worry the hands and foot this way and that. Suddenly a wisp of fuzz appeared in the air. "There's his hair." MacTate motioned to another student to seize it. "Four points. Now stretch him out." The experimental student reappeared entirely and fell to the floor. "There." MacTate took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. "The boy's intact. But the —" He turned to Ransom. "Good heavens, Ransom, what shall we do about the Colonel?"

"I don't care what you do about the Colonel." Ransom was still scowling at the tire. "Damned fathead, busting the bottle like that. This class," — he glanced angrily around at the students — "this class is dismissed. Plan B is all over." He strode down the aisle muttering over the tire.

"But Ransom —" With another anxious look at the recent site of the Colonel, MacTate hastened after his departing colleague.

Ransom was back in his office before MacTate could catch up with him. He took a pair of pliers out of his desk drawer and began to fiddle with the ends of the tire. "Maybe if I put a bigger magnet in one end —"

"But, Ransom," said MacTate, "even if you do reconstruct it, how can you bring him back with it?"

"Him?" Ransom looked up. "Who?"

"The Colonel. Good heavens, man, don't you realize we're responsible for his — departure?"

Ransom looked at him for a moment, then put the pliers down and sank into his swivel chair. "My God, that's right. I hadn't thought of that."

"What do you suppose they'll do to us? Can they court-martial civilians?"

"No." Ransom jabbed a finger at him. "Look. They can't do anything to us. What crime did we commit?"

"Defenestration. Into the fourth dimension."

"Where's the body to prove it?" Ransom began to swing back and forth.

"Very well. Abduction then. Whatever you like." MacTate wiped his brow. "The fact is, a roomful of students saw us do away with the Colonel. A keen prosecutor might even find a subversive motive in it."

Ransom stopped swinging and paled slightly. "You mean we attempted

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to undermine the armed might of — My God, MacTate, they could shoot us for that."

"Hang us, old boy. We were in civilian clothes at the time."

Ransom darted to his feet. "Let's get down to the cold box and try to fix the bottle before they find out. You can glue a rope to me, and I'll go out looking for him. We —"

The phone rang.

Ransom's pallor became tinged with green. "Already —"

MacTate sat down wearily. "Better answer it, old boy. Perhaps we can request clemency in the name of science."

The phone rang again. Ransom stared at it as if it were a cobra. It rang again. He gulped a deep breath and picked it up. "Hello."

The receiver began to crackle angrily. Ransom's mouth fell open. He sank back into his chair.

MacTate leaned forward and raised his eyebrows with interrogative apprehension.

Ransom put his hand over the mouthpiece and looked up. "It's the Colonel." He listened to the tirade for another moment, then looked up again. "He's calling from a filling station near Wheeling, West Virginia. Landed on a farm — No, no, Colonel. We had no intention —" He lifted his hand from the mouthpiece to interpose an objection. "Now listen, Colonel —" The crackling in the receiver continued without pause. He shrugged and looked at MacTate again. "He landed on a farm down there. About an hour ago."

"An hour —? But good heavens, Ransom, how —"

"Fourth dimension. Time factor. *You* know —" Ransom turned his attention back to the Colonel's voice. "No, look, Colonel. It wasn't my fault you — Now wait a minute — What? Listen, you —"

"Old boy —" MacTate noticed his colleague's rising blood pressure. "Don't you think —"

"All right, Flowerbottom." Ransom made a visible effort to keep his blood pressure down. "I admit you have some justification for getting mad. But look, do you know what plane tickets cost? I — look. How about if I buy you a train ticket? It won't take that much longer. And I'll take your class tomorrow. Along with mine — All right. Give me your address there, and I'll wire the money down." He seized a pencil and scribbled on the tablet. "All right, I'll — What? Now listen, Flowerbottom, I said I'd — *What?* Listen, you fatheaded —" He sputtered for a moment, then put the receiver down and regarded it with contempt. "Hung up. That's the tactical mind —"

"But you *are* going to wire him the money and take his class?"

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"Oh, I guess so." Ransom looked up. "But look, MacTate. You sit in on that class. As a witness. He's liable to accuse me of teaching the overthrow of the Fifth Army."

The next day MacTate fell into a state of semi-hypnosis filling in the *o's* in the *Journal of Aesthetics* with a pencil, and did not remember Ransom's class until it was more than half over. He trotted across the campus to Ransom's building, ran up the stairs to room 417, and sank out of breath into a seat in the back row.

Ransom had drawn an S-curve horizontally on the blackboard. "Here's the Tennessee River, with Chattanooga" — he put a dot in the upward bulge at the right — "in the bend. Over here's the Confederate left on Lookout Mountain." He drew a slender parabola, its nose almost touching the river, below the city and to its left. "And here's the Confederate right on Missionary Ridge." He drew a line, parallel to the axis of the parabola, to the city's right. "While down here in Rossville, Georgia," he put a dot toward the bottom of the line, "sits Braxton Bragg, nervously chewing his big black beard." He turned to the class and flourished the chalk. "On account of he knows that his left is threatened by Fighting Joe Hooker, his right by William T. Sherman, and his center by George H. Thomas. While back here in Chattanooga, directing the whole show, is none other than Ulysses S. Grant. It's a predicament."

A student in the front row raised his hand. "Wheah's General Lee?"

"Well, he's up the road a piece taking care of George G. Meade. We'll get to him later." Ransom turned back to the blackboard and surveyed the battlefield. "Anyway, at 1330 hours on the 23rd of November, Grant sends Thomas flying at Bragg's center" — he drew a demonstrative arrow on the board — "which gets pushed down the valley until Thomas can occupy Orchard Knob, a big hill about here." He put an X between Chattanooga and Missionary Ridge. "But that's nothing. Next morning at 800, here comes Fighting Joe Hooker with nine thousand Blues to storm Lookout Mountain." He drew a large, aggressive arrow pointing at the left side of the parabola. "The Grays on the palisades at the top can't see Hooker at all, on account of the low clouds hanging over everything; while Edward C. Walthall, commanding the brigade on the west slope, isn't much better off. Fighting Joe hits his flank in the fog and chases him all the way around the mountain." Ransom turned and regarded the class portentously. "Well, you can just imagine how Braxton Bragg is taking all this. Defeat stares him in the face. Frantically he orders a general retreat to Missionary Ridge, while Ulysses S. Grant in person comes down to Orchard Knob to watch the fun."

"General Lee still not theah?" said a wistful voice in the front row.

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"No." Ransom shook his head. "Bragg's in this all by himself. But wait." He shot out a dramatic finger. "Suddenly Bragg's got an idea. His boys have been retreating just about an hour. Out goes a general order to the brigades of the left and center to get out their bottles. The bugles scream the weird new call. Then at a signal of six cannon shots from Rossville, the left drops over to Lookout Valley, where Hooker came from; and the center drops up to Chattanooga, where Thomas started. You see what they've done. Traded places with the Union armies. This time Walthall comes up through the fog and chases Hooker around Lookout Mountain; while Bragg smacks down on Orchard Knob, where Ulysses S. Grant is still waiting for the fun. Bragg's right, you remember, is still at the upper end of Missionary Ridge playing who'll-flinch-first with Sherman. Now Bragg tells them to charge the other side of the Knob, and Grant is sandwiched in between. So with him captured, it's no trouble at all to rout the other Blues. Bragg. . . ."

"I say, Ransom —" MacTate, in the back row, had a worried look on his face. But Ransom was too far absorbed in his narrative to notice.

". . . invests Chattanooga and then takes half his army up to help Robert E. Lee in the. . . ."

"*Heah's* General Lee."

". . . Mine Run campaign. Between them they make short work of Meade, take Washington and Philadelphia, and besiege New York. After Bragg has made his terrible march to Boston, cutting a swath of devastation through the heart of New England, Chief of Staff Halleck meets Lee at Albany to surrender the Union armies." Ransom looked at his wristwatch. "And that's enough for today. Class dismissed." He marched down the aisle, waved to MacTate to follow him, and went down to his office.

"Wanted to get out of there before that professional Southerner could corner me." Ransom leaned back in his swivel chair. "I —"

"Ransom." MacTate's expression was somewhat severe. "Am I crazy, or did I just hear you teach that class that the South won the Civil War?"

"No, no." Ransom laughed. "You should have come on time and heard the whole thing. See, I took the first half of the period to explain the principle of the Klein bottle. For *my* class. Then I used the rest of the time to illustrate a hypothetical military application. What could have happened if the South had had calibrated Klein bottles at Chattanooga. It was all imaginary."

"You think that boy in the front row thought it was imaginary?"

"Oh, him. Well, who cares" — suddenly Ransom whipped a handkerchief from his pocket and sneezed violently — "whad he thigs." He blew his nose. "Damn it, MacTate, I'm coming down with something bad." A far-

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away look came into his eyes. "I wonder if I could have picked up a bunch of four dimensional germs fooling with that Klein bottle."

Ransom's diagnosis proved accurate in effect if not in cause. The next two days he was kept at home with a severe cold. MacTate wondered if the Colonel was taking Ransom's class along with the ROTC students, but was diffident of investigating.

"You see, old boy," he told Ransom on his return, "I was afraid he might interrogate me as to the soundness of your military doctrine, and as Plato says, a lie —"

"What did I teach them wrong?" Ransom swung petulantly in his swivel chair. "Anyway, we'll soon know whether he took them." He looked at his wristwatch. "We've got another joint class this afternoon."

"Yes." MacTate pursed his lips. "I was just wondering how you're going to arrange it now that the Klein bottle —"

The door opened. Ransom and MacTate looked up. It was the Colonel.

"Well, Ransom, I see you're back." He strode past the desk as if he were reviewing troops, but there was a nasty glint in his eye.

Ransom closed his mouth and tried to look nonchalant. "Sure, I'm back. I see you're back too."

"Yes." The Colonel sat down on the edge of a chair, leaning forward slightly, as if with eagerness. "I'm back." He took a paper from his breast pocket, unfolded it, and glanced at it with an expression of unmitigated malice. "I was interested in finding out what you had been teaching the ROTC class while I was — away." He looked up at Ransom. "So I gave them a test yesterday."

MacTate had a sudden odd feeling in the pit of his stomach.

"On the Battle of Chattanooga. That's what you — presented to them, wasn't it?"

"Sure." Ransom was swinging in his swivel chair with nervous twitches. He took a deep breath. "I trust everybody came away with a vivid impression."

"Yes." The Colonel looked at the paper in his hand with a peculiar smile. "One chap in particular wrote an extremely interesting account. Perhaps you'd like to hear it."

Ransom glowered. The Colonel began to read.

"General Bragg was in Rossville, Georgia, nervously chewing on his big black beard account of General Lee wasn't anywheres near the battlefield so at 1330 Grant captured Orchard Knob which made General Bragg feel mighty low account of he knew the north had pretty good generals without General Lee was there so next morning at 800 Hooker stormed Lookout Mountain in a fog and General Bragg he started to retreat to Missionary

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Ridge only he remembered his men had fourth dimensional canteens and weird new bugles which they traded places with the northern armies with so Grant gave hisself up on Orchard Knob to our right so then General Bragg could go help General Lee march to Washington, Philadelphia and Boston and they finally surrendered at Albany the north."

The Colonel regarded the paper with malevolent satisfaction. "I've called several papers to send reporters out to see me." He looked up at Ransom again.

"Why?"

"Oh, I thought they might be interested in the way some university professors teach history. It might even get national coverage, since it's about American history. Of course" — the Colonel looked Ransom straight in the eye — "if room 417 were to be made available —"

"Flowerbottom. That's blackmail."

"A harsh word, Ransom. Let's say it's a proffered bargain. Since you don't feel that you owe me anything after that dastardly trick you played with the Klein's bottle —"

"The trick *I* played? How about you tearing it apart like that? For no reason at all? To think what we could have done with it if you —"

"By the way, Ransom," said MacTate. "Not to change the subject, but do you think the Klein bottle might actually have an application of the sort you described to the class?"

Ransom looked at him. "You mean in tactical maneuvers? I don't know. How'll we ever know now that he's busted it?"

MacTate rubbed his nose. "But if you were planning to attempt a reconstruction, wouldn't the Army be interested in it? Give you a research subsidy or something like that?"

"Well, what if they would? What's that got to do with who gets room —"

"Nothing really, I suppose. It just occurred to me that they might like to know about the loss of a gadget that could transport personnel to a place like Wheeling and gain an hour doing it."

"MacTate, what are you —" Suddenly Ransom's eyes brightened. "You mean in my application for a research grant I'd have to tell them how the first one got broken?" He turned slowly and looked at the Colonel. "And by whom?"

"Oh, well, of course you wouldn't want to do it in that case," said MacTate.

"No, of course not." Ransom grinned. "We wouldn't want the Colonel to get in trouble for sabotaging developmental war gadgets. Would we?"

The Colonel looked uncomfortable.

"But on the other hand," said MacTate, "I'm sure the Colonel was

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only joking about his intention of publishing the Southern chap's test paper. It would simply be a matter of your blowing each other up, so to speak. So that the matter of room 417 actually remains unsolved."

"What a big help *you* are." Ransom leaned back in his swivel chair.

"Well, to take a constructive view of the matter," MacTate went on unperturbed, "I would suggest that you take turns occupying 417, thus arriving at that equality of dissatisfaction which, as someone — Talleyrand I think — observed, is the nearest approach to happiness possible in the human state."

Both Ransom and the Colonel looked at him resentfully.

"Of course it's none of my business. Just a suggestion." MacTate shrugged.

The Colonel sighed. "In that case, who gets the room today?"

"Well, you've really had it only once, while Ransom's had it —" MacTate caught Ransom's glance and stopped abruptly.

"Then it's mine today." The Colonel got up. "After that I take turns. With a class of five." He turned his back on Ransom and walked stiffly to the door. As he opened it, he turned around. "Someday, Ransom, I'm going to catch you when your lawyer isn't with you. Then watch out." He slammed the door behind him.

"I say, Ransom, does he really think I'm your —" MacTate stopped again. Ransom was still staring at him.

"Don't worry about what he thinks." Ransom shook his head slowly. "You should hear what I'm thinking."

"But, old boy, I did get you out of some sort of mess, didn't I?"

"You got him out of one, too." Ransom laughed sardonically. "I don't know what we'd do without you. Either of us." He grinned. "Fighting Joe Flowerbottom and Braxton P. Ransom, having a nice quiet little battle, both get kicked in the rear by Benedict MacTate. And if that's the wrong war" — he sighed and swung back to his desk — "I'm glad."

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There is a peculiar endemic madness in the British Isles which persuades otherwise rational authors, particularly of detective stories and science fiction, that they can write as Americans and nobody will notice the difference. (We well recall a novel written by one of our favorite British authors and edited by one of our favorite American editors, in which the characters drove lorries *around the streets of New York and effected repairs on those lorries with* spanners.) *"The British are so fond," Evelyn Smith writes us, "of writing science fiction in the American idiom that I felt it only courteous for an American (me) to write one with a British flavour." The result is as deadly as only true courtesy can be.*

The Last of the Spode

by EVELYN E. SMITH

"It is my theory," said the Professor, sipping his tea thoughtfully, "that the character of a people can be discerned from its linguistic analogies."

"Really?" Angela murmured as she dissected a scone. "The butter looks rather foul, doesn't it? I do hope the freezer hasn't gone wonky on us. That would be the absolute end."

"Now rhyming is of course," he continued, "primarily a mnemonic device. However, I would extend this to include not only actual verse but the essential character of the words themselves. Why is it that certain particular words agree in terminal sound; what semantic relationships did their speakers find between or among them? . . . Now *custard* and *mustard* I can understand. They are both edible and — ah — glutinous. But why *bustard*?"

"Perhaps a bustard is glutinous when it's cooked," Angela replied vaguely. "I shouldn't think one would want to eat it raw."

"Once I have discovered precisely why the creators of the English language chose — even though the choice was, of course, hardly on a conscious level — to rhyme *bustard* with *custard* and, of course, *mustard*," the Professor went on, "I feel I shall discover the key to the English character. Undoubtedly the same theory would apply to other languages . . . French, Arabic, Swahili. Through semantics one would achieve a true understanding

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of all the peoples of the world." He frowned. "Don't know what one would do about the Americans, though, with no proper language of their own."

"But you can't understand the peoples of the world, in any case," Angela pointed out as she covered the dubious butter thickly with jam. "Because there aren't any people any more. Just us."

"There is that difficulty. But perhaps you and Eric will reproduce. After all, it will be 50 years before the radiations die down enough for Them to cross over here. By then we should have been able to establish at least two generations, although, of course, they would hardly have time to formulate any linguistic variants."

"I don't think I should care to reproduce with Eric," Angela said, brushing crumbs off her frock onto the barren ground. "I think I shall let the race die with me. Rather a pretty thought."

"Not the sporting thing to do at all," he reproached her. "You must look at the matter from the larger viewpoint."

"Why?" she asked. "I have no urge to provide the components of a zoo — and that seems to be the only future open to the human race."

"Sonics, anyone?" Eric asked, as he came up swinging a sonics rod against his immaculate white sports tunic.

"Oh no, Eric!" Angela said. "The radiations are still giving off too much heat. Besides, it would be a waste of power. We're going to need all we've got, you know, and there are just so many tins."

"I daresay you're right," he replied manfully, but he could not quite hide his disappointment. "What's that you have there? Tea? I do think you might have called a chap." Settling himself at Angela's feet, he put out a hand for the cup. "You haven't done at all well by the bread, old girl. It's fearfully thick."

"I haven't managed to get the hang of slicing it. But then, I haven't had a fearful lot of practice yet. Remember, Nora got blasted only day before yesterday."

"Only day before yesterday? That's right. Seems as if you'd been cooking for us for an eternity — Not," Eric added with speed, "that I mean to hint anything of a derogatory nature about your cooking, pet. It's just that some have the gift and others haven't."

"But will there be enough food?" the Professor asked, absent-mindedly slipping a handful of sandwiches into his pocket. "There isn't much use conserving power if there won't be enough food."

Eric brightened. "You're quite right, Professor. So why don't we have a round of sonics after all?" His face fell. "Oh, I forgot, I've already started my tea. Must wait an hour or frightful things happen to the jolly old viscera."

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"We have plenty of food," Angela said. "Enough for 50 years."

"Fifty years! Think we'll be here as long as that?" Eric slammed his cup petulantly on the ground.

"Watch out, Eric," Angela warned. "This is the last of the Spode."

"But it's going to be frightfully dull here," Eric murmured. "Especially if I can't run down to London now and then. You're sure London got it too?"

"Quite sure," Angela replied gently. "Every place got it. Every place but here. We're the only three people left in the world, Eric."

"I do wonder why we escaped," the Professor speculated. "Something to do with the soil, I should say. You know nothing ever would grow here. Probably some sort of natural force field. Interesting."

"If one of us were scientific," Angela remarked, "he could occupy himself for the next 50 years in trying to determine just what the reason was."

"No point to it," Eric muttered. "No point to anything, really."

"We must face the facts, lad," the Professor said. "Pity about the Bodleian, though."

Eric slewed his lissome body around until he faced the Professor. "And at the end of 50 years? Then what happens?"

The old scholar held out his cup for more tea. "The radiations will die down enough for Them to cross, I expect."

"Remember, Angela," Eric assured her, "I have a disintegrator. When They come, I shall use it on you."

"But why?" Angela asked, shaking the pot to make sure there was enough tea for her before she served the Professor. "They're not human, you know."

"Never thought of that," Eric agreed. "And after 50 years I daresay it wouldn't matter even if They were." He looked up at her. "But I'm human, you know."

She sighed. "No, I don't know. Sorry, Eric, but it's utterly out of the question."

He flung his sonics rod on the ground peevishly. "The whole thing is a crashing bore. I shouldn't be surprised if after ten years or so I use the disintegrator on myself."

The other two shook their heads in unison. "Not the sort of thing one does, you know," the Professor reproved him. "We must face things. Come, try one of Angela's scones. They're not half bad considered in the light of a scientific experiment."

"Don't want a scone," Eric muttered. "I wish I were dead like everyone else."

The blatant bad taste of this took both the others' breath away.

"He's not himself, you know," Angela finally whispered to the Professor.

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"After all, it has been a bit nerve-racking, and he always was a sensitive lad."

"We all have our feelings," the Professor grumbled, "but we don't wash them in public."

"Come, Eric," Angela tempted him, "do try one of my scones. If you do, I'll open a tin of power and play a set of sonics with you as soon as our tea has settled."

Eric brightened. "Oh, that'll be wizard! But I'd rather have a chocolate biscuit."

"Come now," smiled the Professor, "try a scone. Let it never be said that an Englishman was a coward." He wiggled one eyebrow, a sign that he was about to perpetrate a witticism. "It'll probably have the same effect on you as a disintegrator."

All three laughed.

A frown creased Eric's smooth brow. "I've just thought of something absolutely ghastly."

"What is it?" Angela asked, rising to take the pot back to the scullery for more hot water.

"Supposing the tea doesn't hold out for 50 years?"

There was a dead silence.

With the rays of the setting sun tangled in her golden curls and glinting on the teapot which she proudly bore aloft, Angela looked like more than a splendid figure of young English womanhood; she looked like a goddess. "The tea must hold out," she said.

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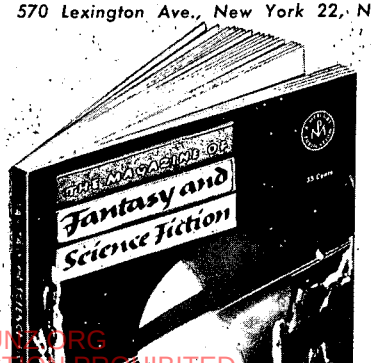

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